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ABSTRACT

This report details the impact of Class Size Reduction (CSR) on six school districtsin California. The schools were chosen because they were typical of the changing demographics that affect almost all the state's districts. Data were gathered from interviews with administrators and teachers in the Spring of 1997. Results show that some of the most difficult challenges these districts faced were one-time occurrences: finding qualified teachers on short notice, when to make the transition in year-round schools, and finding enough portable classrooms. Long-term problems included an exhausted teacher pool of qualified candidates; the lack of space in schools; the extra burden on administrators who have to evaluate and lead more personnel; confusion over program assessment, such as the lack of initial baseline data that would allow districts to demonstrate the effectiveness of CSR; and inequities created by CSR, such as the extra work required of teachers in higher grades. Despite the problems, there were notable successes: learning environments changed dramatically for the better, working conditions for teachers improved, and a greater sense of community and creativity was exhibited by the schools. Contains 22 references. (RJM)

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MAKING CLASS SIZE REDUCTION WORK:

Stories from California's Public Schools

by Anne C. Lewis

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The Association of California School Administrators and the Educational Research Service are working together to enhance the use of practical research and information in California's public schools. This cooperative effort gives ACSA members access to many ERS resources and services, including resources such as this publication prepared specifically for California school leaders. ACSA is committed to improving its services to members and strongly believes that including the objective research and information from ERS will help educators make the best possible decisions for the students in school districts throughout California.

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Foreword

A few months into the first year of class size reduction, Cheryl Ernst, then ACSA president, and I talked about the details that had to be put in place so quickly–new classrooms, more teachers, and special training to name a few. We both were struck by the professionalism of administrators, teachers, and others who worked diligently throughout the summer months to make the program work. All of us were also very much aware of the complexity of the task faced and of the attention that would be focused on California's public schools.

We agreed that ACSA members needed and deserved to know what districts throughout the state were doing to implement the CSR program. Thanks to ACSA's committee structure and active membership, the task of compiling this information was possible.

Each of California's school districts is unique. It would be impossible to cover all of them in a report of this size. As you will note, six districts were contacted and asked if they would be willing to contribute already scarce staff time to talk about what they had done to make CSR work. These districts are representative of our state.

Having served as a teacher, principal, and superintendent, I can appreciate how difficult it must have been to make this program work. I know all too well the obstacles districts faced and are now facing in the second year of CSR. I am proud that ACSA has been able to serve as a clearinghouse for information and our members have been able to network with one another to find solutions to CSR's almost insurmountable challenges.

Our work continues to ensure that California's investment in CSR is worth its cost. ACSA is working with state lawmakers to promote increased flexibility in the program and more funding for school facilities as our top priorities. We appreciate our members' continued support in these endeavors, and we hope this report is helpful to individual district CSR efforts.

Tom Giugni
Executive Director, ACSA

Acknowledgments

The partnership ACSA and ERS developed to provide research and information to California school administrators began during very exciting times for public schools in the state. Working on this project highlighting class size reduction has provided ERS with a window on both the CSR program and the efforts of school leaders across the state who are charged with the responsibility of making the new funding beneficial to students.

The author selected by ERS to work on this project was enthusiastic about it before she began. After the project was completed, she characterized the experiences she had while visiting California schools and talking with teachers and administrators there as "delightful." Her appreciation for these people and the job that they did in the first year of CSR is evident in her profiles of the places and people she visited.

Anne C. Lewis is an experienced and nationally known education policy writer, and author of the *Phi Delta Kappan* column "Washington Commentary." For the past few years, she has been involved with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation initiative for urban middle grades reform and has visited California schools as part of this project. In her role as narrative documentor of the middle school movement, she has authored *Making It in the Middle: The Why and How of Excellent Schools for Young Urban Adolescents and Gaining Ground: The Highs and Lows of Urban Middle School Reform.* She also wrote *Restructuring America's Schools,* published by the American Association of School Administrators. We wish to thank Anne for her excellent work and for how well she enables us to see and understand what went on during the first busy and productive year of the CSR program.

Nancy J. Protheroe, ERS Director of Research, deserves special recognition for the insight and experience she brought to her role in directing and coordinating this project.

We also thank the school leaders and educators who were visited and interviewed. Although efforts to implement CSR made their normally busy schedules even more hectic and demanding than usual, they took the time to answer questions and to reflect on what had happened and what they hoped for the future. It has been an interesting and extraordinarily demanding year for California's public school leaders, and we enjoyed the opportunity to have a very special view of what went on. Like all of you, ERS is committed to making a difference in our children's futures, and we have appreciated this chance to highlight the outstanding efforts made by California educators to make the promise of CSR work.

John Forsyth
President, ERS

INTRODUCTION

Stories of Class Size Reduction: A California-style Challenge

Californians take crises in their stride admirably well. Still, neither quirky Mother Nature nor a seesawing economy ever challenged the entire state's ability to respond to a crisis in quite the same way as the $1 billion investment in creating smaller class sizes for young children. With the Legislature's expansion of the Class Size Reduction (CSR) program for 1997-98 and $1.5 billion to fund it, the program has become "one of the biggest education reform investments in history," as one commentary aptly described it.

During the 1996-97 school year, with only a few weeks notice, the 853 participating districts:

- hired over 18,000 more teachers than had been anticipated at the beginning of the summer;
- found space for the transition despite existing overcrowding in many districts;
- provided smaller 20-to-1 pupil-teacher ratios for 92 percent of the state's first graders and 74 percent of its second graders, with CSR implemented in over 52,000 classrooms;
- mounted massive professional development for teachers; and
- found ways to cover the gap between the state funding and the actual cost of the initiative, a $100-$200 per student gap for many districts.

This incredible effort has been documented in early reports that summarize general findings and statewide survey data. The heart of the class size reduction effort, however, is in the stories of how specific schools and school districts met this challenge.

While considerable attention may be paid to the broad policy debate concerning class size reduction, the fact is that thousands of young children entered a different world of education in 1996-97 because individual educators, parents, and community leaders across the state rallied to a cause they believed in deeply.

Teachers in the smaller classes may have thought "they have died and gone to heaven," as one administrator told us. However, another admitted that the transformation left those who made it possible "truly tired."

What follows in the next six chapters is a report of the impact of the CSR program in six school districts: Campbell Union Elementary School District, Paramount Unified School District, Surprise Valley Joint Unified School District, Glendale Unified School District, Los Alamitos Unified School District, and Riverside Unified School District.

These districts were selected with assistance from staff of the Association of California School Administrators to represent a diverse range of conditions and challenges. None are among the state's very largest districts, which encountered their own special problems in mounting a response to the opportunity for smaller classes. Most, however, are quite typical of the changing demographics that affect almost all districts in the state. They all also operated under the same rules–the limitations and possibilities of the legislation.

The author visited all of these districts in the spring of 1997, and conducted interviews with administrators and teachers. Staff members in the districts generously took time from their busy schedules to talk about what the class size reduction program has meant to their students and about the many ways CSR has changed their work and challenged their schools.

Stories similar to the ones in the following chapters could be told about districts throughout the state, but not all could be visited. In every district that implemented CSR, school and district staff had to take action quickly, with all the planning and activity directed toward the same goal: making class size reduction work for children. Here are a few examples.

King Elementary School (Compton Unified School District) developed a program that encouraged parent involvement and made more time available for teachers to provide individualized and personalized instruction to students. The 50-50 partnership program trained parents to work with 50 percent of each first-grade class for 30 minutes each day in psychomotor and art activities. During this time, the teacher worked with only 10 students. The minimal costs involved were paid covered by categorical funds.

Preparing newly hired teachers took on an added twist in the **Sanger Unified School District,** one that helped provide staff development opportunities for experienced teachers while easing the new teachers into their classrooms. Sanger Unified hired all of its CSR teachers in August. Since a large number of the new teachers held emergency credentials and an important district focus is early literacy training, it was decided not to place the new teachers in their classrooms until the second semester of school. During the first semester, the new teachers received training every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday on early literacy strategies, classroom management, technology, thematic instruction, and implementation of the new math series. On Mondays and Fridays during the first month of school, they worked in classrooms in which the students who would eventually be assigned to them were being taught.

The new teachers had the opportunity to observe the teaching style of the experienced teachers, learn the students' names, interact with parents, and assess the students before classes were reorganized the second semester. After this first month of school, the new teachers worked as substitute teachers in the classrooms of the experienced teachers on Mondays and Fridays, while the veteran teachers attended literacy and class size reduction training.

At **Rosecrans Elementary School** (Compton Unified School District), the staff built on the opportunities provided for better home-school connections made possible by smaller pupil-teacher ratios. A program was developed to include parents in the first-grade portfolio assessment process. After parent education classes and workshops, first graders' parents reviewed and identified two pieces of work that they wanted to send forward to the second-grade teachers for the 1997-98 school year. This was a major activity at the school's spring Open House, helped better inform parents, and provided good information for the second-grade teachers.

A system of mentors and coaches for new teachers was developed to help the **Oakley Union School District** implement class size reduction successfully. This practice included designating two mentor teachers who worked with all five school sites, as well as three coaches for each school. Each coach was assigned as the contact person for up to three new teachers who could come to him or her for help and support with school procedures, forms, school-wide programs, curriculum, and discipline. The mentors met monthly with the coaches and discussed curriculum, classroom management, school-wide programs, and activities, with information developed at each of these sessions to pass on to the new teachers.

Mentors were also responsible for ensuring that all of the coaches were following through with their new teachers in relationship building, support, and teamwork. Staff development for experienced as well as new primary-grades teachers was also a focus. A committee of teachers (one from each school) offered an after-school course for teachers called Literacy for All, which met monthly for 90 minutes after school. In addition, each teacher-leader held meetings at his or her own school to focus on issues of concern for the site. The topics (one per month) included shared reading, literacy centers, management of centers and small groups, guided reading, phonemic awareness and phonics, writing, and assessment. The course, which was taught in addition to the regular staff development, was expanded to include third-grade through fifth-grade teachers due to interest they expressed.

At the **Malcolm X School** (Berkeley Unified School District), two additional sections of K-2 were added as part of the CSR initiative, one as school opened and another in February, when the needed portable classroom that had been ordered during the summer arrived. The sections were opened with minimal school or student disruption, thanks to strong and early communication with parents and teamwork among staff. The staff met with parents to explain the plan before school started to make sure that parents both understood and supported the school's efforts.

In order to avoid separating children from a previously assigned teacher, all the children were taught in rotation by three teachers, one primarily responsible for language arts, one for math and science, and the third for ecology-environmental studies. Holding the ecology group outdoors in the yard and garden area created space during the weeks before the portable classroom arrived and the students moved into their final groupings. Having all the teachers work with all the children at the beginning of the year avoided any sense of a child "stuck" with the new teacher.

The **Hesperia Unified School District** drew on previously untapped assets to help prepare its 65 newly hired teachers for class size reduction. Recently-retired elementary master teachers, nominated by principals and experienced teachers, were contracted to mentor and guide the new group. Their job was to model lessons; help develop instructional units; observe and provide feedback; conduct needs assessments; and develop weekly workshops.

Master teachers and others offered weekly staff development after school–this was required and took place throughout the year. Topics presented were suggested by new teachers and included, for example, discipline, classroom management, learning styles, grouping students, and reading. Most important were the relationships that master and new teachers formed; new teachers felt comfortable asking for help and discussion on a variety of issues. As an added benefit, the retired master teachers were very flexible in their time and could observe instruction throughout the day.

In the **Rialto Unified School District,** staff development designed to "really impact the instruction in 20:1 classrooms" included targeted support for beginning teachers; professional development to improve teacher skills, especially in reading and mathematics; planning the instructional program to include appropriate instructional practices for small-group and individual delivery; training in use of a variety of assessment techniques; and assistance in identifying and building on the individual strengths of pupils.

In addition to including a variety of topics in the program, the district also recognized that different groups of teachers (current first-grade and second-grade teachers, veterans new to those grades, new teachers and interns, and retired teachers rehired for CSR) had different needs for training. The table on the following page, created by the district, shows the training schedule for these various groups. Teachers assigned to 20:1 classrooms were required to complete the training prior to working in the classroom. Although this made for an extremely busy fall, it provided a clear focus on individualized instruction, effective teaching and management, identification of and response to pupil needs, and attention to building individual pupil strengths.

The cost and availability of facilities were issues that had to be addressed across the state. In order to create additional classroom space, the **Lamont School District** used two triple-wide portable classrooms 36' x 40' (1,440

Training Schedule for Different Groups of Teachers, Rialto Unified School District

	Teachers Grades 1,2	Veterans New to 1,2	New Teachers Interns	Retired Teachers
Day 1: Balanced, Comprehensive Reading and Math Program, State and Legislative Recommendations, Early Literacy Teaching Strategies	✔	✔	✔	
Day 2: Small Group Instruction, Management of Primary Classroom	✔	✔	✔	
Day 3: Standards, Assessment, "Intentional Teaching"	✔	✔	✔	
Day 4: Student Strengths Multiple Intelligences	✔	✔	✔	
Day 5: Developmentally Appropriate Instruction, Parent Partnerships		✔		
Day 5,6: Lesson Planning and Classroom Management, Pacing, Parent Partnerships, "Fine-tuning"			✔	
RETOOL "Tailored Assistance"		✔		✔
Mentor	Request	Request	✔	Request
Observations	1	1	2+	As needed

square feet each) to create four separate 18' x 40' (720 square feet) classrooms. These rooms are large enough to house 20 students, one teacher, one aide, volunteers, and all furniture, while the cost for each triple-wide was 30-35 percent less than two full-size 24' x 40' (960 square feet) classrooms purchased separately.

The **Vacaville Unified School District** decided to include first, second, and third grade in CSR and to implement the program in January. In order to ensure that teachers would be available, new teachers were recruited and hired during the fall. Since the district knew that the state CSR subsidy would not cover all costs if these teachers started work immediately, new teachers were put on the payroll effective December 1 (when staff development activities began), although their health insurance coverage started October 1. They were also offered the opportunity to substitute and be paid the substitute daily rate during October and November. In addition to saving money, the plan to use these new teachers as substitutes meant that they became known as members of the staff, which helped to make the transition to the new classes easier.

These examples of what some California schools did to make CSR work are only highlights of the creativity and hard work that took place in schools and school districts throughout the state. The following chapters include more detail for each of the six profiled districts, providing a richer picture of the complexity of CSR-related change. While each of the six stories is an individual one, collectively they give insight into the strategies that school districts used to make such comprehensive changes so quickly, and the common problems they encountered.

CAMPBELL UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

With a Plan in Place, Full Speed Ahead

K-8 school district with 7,560 students.

Demographics changing rapidly to high number of language-minority students.

Already uses many portable classrooms.

Recognized for the support given staff and for the support provided by the community.

Stable, cohesive leadership.

Campbell Union School District, south of San Francisco, had a plan waiting for something big to happen. The plan was called "Target Tomorrow," and the "something" turned out to be legislative passage of the CSR program. Without a chance for a practice run and with only a few weeks to get all of the pieces to come together, district staff moved into high gear in July 1996.

The district decided to start the class size reduction program right away rather than delay it until February. Marcia Plumleigh, superintendent of Campbell for 13 years, is not an incrementalist. Sometimes, she says, "you have to shock the system to change."

Campbell has had a strong professional development program for almost a decade. The district involved its community—cohesive even though the district draws from six cities in the area—in putting together the "Target Tomorrow" plan, setting goals and strategies to ensure that all students achieve the district's academic standards.

Rather than lower expectations for the rapidly increasing language-minority student population (up 50 percent between 1990 and 1993, to a total of 42 percent), district leaders decided to increase the capacity of the school system to help all children achieve academically. "You can't make specific plans five years ahead," says the superintendent, "so you need goals, standards, and core values as a framework for the planning."

Smaller class sizes in the primary grades fit right in with the district's goals. It would have been better to have a more rational implementation stage, Plumleigh believes, "but this was a good move. We weren't going to look a gift horse in the mouth."

How the District Rallied to Meet the Challenge

When word reached the superintendent that the class size reduction initiative had been funded, she called the staff into action from New York City, where she was attending a summer institute. Principals came back from vacation to meet in mid-July, and they immediately formed interview teams for hiring new staff. The business division began to order additional materials and equipment. Because it is a growing district, Campbell has qualified for state aid on facilities for several years, and additional portable classrooms were in the pipeline. (It now has 113 such classrooms scattered among 11 campuses.) Still, every elementary school principal needed to juggle permanent space to find additional classrooms.

Campbell district officials decided to activate the initiative in September 1996 in both first and second grades because they believed they had a pool of potential teachers available and could squeeze out the space. The decision brought immediate, unexpected change—hiring 75 new teachers, providing professional support for the teachers, and finding space in a district already beginning to look like a "portable city."

Despite the haste, Plumleigh thinks the decision was right. Districts that delayed implementing the initiative until February, she says, may have found that by then the teaching pool as well as the supply of portable classrooms had been depleted.

Staff Development Is the Core

Staff development became the core of Campbell's response to reduced class sizes for young children. Working under a long-range plan that extends to the year 2002, the district speeded up the process of training first-grade and second-grade teachers in early literacy, and added components to help new teachers with classroom management, assessment, and other district focus areas. The district's 17 mentor teachers, in addition to two bilingual mentor teachers and two teacher advisers, were assigned to new teacher support.

While the focus of staff development was on new teachers hired for the class size reduction initiative, all teachers of young children benefited, according to Cindy Moore, Coordinator of Curriculum and Professional Development. Sessions for the new teachers in first grade took place every third day during September, but everyone involved in the initiative, including long-term teachers, became part of the development activities. Second-grade teachers followed the same schedule in October, and kindergarten teachers participated in staff development in January.

"We now have a common language and common practices across all three grades," says Moore. Because of the stimulation of shared professional development, teachers are meeting with staff developers biweekly, bringing in student work to discuss, and conducting in-class research. Experienced teachers who were reluctant to admit they needed professional development "saw what the others were learning and began to join in," she adds. According to Gerry Chartrand, Associate Superintendent for Instructional Services, teachers are already pointing to the professional development they received, not just the smaller classes, as responsible for some of the gains they are observing in students.

Teachers Describe the Difference in Smaller Classes

Teachers in Campbell Union were asked to jot down short observations describing their now-smaller classrooms during the year. Their comments contain themes of better communication with parents, opportunities for individualized attention to students, calmer classrooms, and increased satisfaction with teaching. But to report only general themes would fail to communicate the excitement many of the teachers were feeling as they progressed through the first year of CSR. Here are a few typical comments.

First-grade teachers:

- December was a busy month that went way too fast. I am anxious for January to come since so many students are making progress in reading. In December all students improved by at least one level. I have been working with my lowest three students one-on-one every day while the other children are working at centers.
- We are all making progress. The children really enjoy reading, which makes me happy. It is not just a lesson.
- It is so much easier to really know each child, their strengths, reading levels, etc.
- All my parents showed up for parent conferences (a first!)–I have had a much higher rate of homework returned than ever before.
- January was a wonderful teaching month. My class has blossomed into a group of confident early readers who love to read. There has been so much growth in each child. Guided reading is going very well, and the students look forward to reading with me. I'm encouraged by their enthusiasm! I've seen the most growth in my three lowest–their literacy skills and confidence have really improved.

Second-grade teachers:

- Now I have 20 kids–it feels as though I have 1/2 the class. I can easily read with each child. I can meet with them daily. I can do small groups–the possibilities are endless! How exciting! Now my eight children who are struggling can get the help they need.
- The gap is closing between students on and below grade level. It's very exciting to see them move so quickly. Their support for one another and pride in themselves is increasingly evident in this smaller class.
- The number of students below grade level continues to drop. I feel confident that by June all of these children will be at grade level–what a great feeling!

- I have used a system that incorporates individual and small group instruction for several years. The smaller class size makes this method even more effective and powerful. I have been able to do guided reading with individual students two or more times each week. Prior to class size reduction, the amount of time I could spend one-on-one was much less. When I do all-class activities, I can get around to each student's needs much more quickly and effectively.
- My reading groups are fluid and ever-changing—children's reading skills continue to reach higher levels, and with only 19, I am always able to know where they are!

The Rosemary Elementary School Experience

Panic. That was Principal Connie Elness' reaction when she heard that her K-4 school would be turned upside down by the class size reduction initiative within a few weeks—and while she was on medical leave for a serious illness. Already somewhat chaotic because of the construction of a new school just behind the present complex, Rosemary nevertheless was a school that hungered for the advantages of smaller class sizes. Serving a predominantly immigrant population in an area with high levels of drug activity and gangs, the school is a haven for both students and families. Two-thirds of the students are ESL, 96 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and 30-40 percent of them move every year.

Rosemary Elementary provides a preschool program, a medical clinic and counseling center for families, after-school programs, and a full schedule of classes for parents. Parents are asked to come in to assist in the bilingual classes, but actually another purpose is to help them with their English literacy skills. In addition, 90 parents attend literacy classes held in the evenings, and the school has developed packets of videos and books to send home with parents. Rosemary's goal is not only to serve its diverse students and families well, but also to make sure all students are bilingual and bi-literate by the end of the fourth grade.

Despite Elness' absence (although she dropped in frequently), Rosemary pulled off the addition of five classes. Elness has been at the school for two

years and describes the staff as cohesive and child-oriented. This "remarkable" staff, she says, participated with teacher selection, decided on how to find space, and enlisted parents to help them clean, reorganize, and decorate the rooms at night. Half of the library space was turned over to a class, new portables were brought in, and an old one was refurbished. The resource specialist moved into the old portable because it did not have running water and could not be used for students. Reading Recovery stations were put in a refurbished boiler room where the existence of only one electrical outlet limited the staff somewhat—either the lights or the fan could be on, but not both.

All K-2 teachers at Rosemary received staff development on literacy. This was already in the works, largely because of a grant from the Noyce Foundation to the district for its early literacy efforts, but the class size reduction initiative speeded up the process and created a demand for total staff involvement. As part of the program, two coordinators of the literacy program periodically identify a research-based topic according to teachers' needs. Last year, the staff met once a month on a voluntary basis to discuss the topic and related research; this year, the discussion time was built into the professional development program for all teachers.

Elness characterizes the four full days of literacy training that K-2 teachers received in the fall as the "most important piece of class size reduction." These teachers had been training on the elements of Effective First Teaching for several years; CSR provided the impetus to intensify this training.

Elness says her first-grade and second-grade teachers "think they have died and gone to heaven." The previous year they were teaching 30 to 32 students, ending each day exhausted and frustrated because they had not been able to spend enough time with students individually. While teaching strategies have not changed radically, according to the principal, the reduction to 20 students means that "teachers are getting to every child every day to work one-on-one. Before, they were lucky to be able to do that once a week." The first change that Fran Butler, bilingual first-grade teacher, noticed was "that we got through everything I planned for the week. Also, there are fewer behavior problems and more learning going on."

Although space was unavailable to move all kindergartens to reduced class sizes, there are two credentialed teachers assigned to kindergarten math and reading groups for 100 minutes each day. The cohesiveness of the staff at Rosemary has prevented any resentment from third-grade and fourth-grade teachers, even though they have less prep time and one-third more par-

ent conferences than teachers in the early grades. As a principal, the biggest change for Elness is that she now has five more teachers to supervise and evaluate, and that many more classrooms to maintain.

Student achievement is up, with student levels of learning in February looking like the June picture from the year before. For Rosemary's students, putting money into smaller class sizes was "absolutely" the right place to spend state funds, Elness says.

Elness believes the smaller sizes should be extended through the sixth grade, especially for students who lack English language development skills at home.

The Blackford Elementary School Experience

The possibility of smaller class sizes had always excited Principal David Pribyl and the staff at Blackford Elementary School, but he saw no hope of being able to achieve this vision. A dual immersion (English and Spanish) school with 850 students (500 in 1997-98 because of the opening of a new school), Blackford eagerly launched the CSR initiative immediately after receiving the go-ahead.

The school had a pool of "prep-time" teachers who taught science, art, and other classes on a schedule that provided regular classroom teachers time for planning. These teachers and their classrooms became a source for the five additional teachers and classrooms needed to reduce class sizes in first grade. To expand the initiative to the second grade, Blackford had to do additional teacher recruiting and restructure use of the library so that half of it could be used as a classroom.

By the end of September, all teachers and classrooms were in place. Teachers who had been at Blackford had already received comprehensive training in education for literacy. In order to help new teachers understand this "culture," they attended, along with all other Blackford teachers, staff development which began in October. By using a roving substitute teacher, Pribyl was able to schedule teachers for two 90-minute sessions each week for the month.

The effect of smaller class sizes became evident almost immediately, according to the principal and teachers. Second-grade teacher Linda Parkes, who became a teacher 30 years ago, sees the change as dramatic. "I am a better diagnostician, I can pull children for specific work, and our focus on new math strategies and technology are much more doable," she says. Compared to the previous year, when she had 30 children in her class, she observes an increased growth in reading skills. The training teachers received was "very exciting," even for this experienced teacher, because she recognized the need to learn new strategies to help children coming to school with much less literacy background than the students she was prepared to teach many years ago.

> ***"Parents have agreed that the reduction to 20 pupils has been a very positive move. I have been more able to address the many academic and social needs presented by each and every student. I have been able to begin implementing much of the literacy teaching strategies that I have gained from my Early Literacy Learning training in San Mateo. I currently utilize running records, literacy centers, Writer's Workshop, guided reading and writing, shared reading and writing, as well as interactive reading and writing.***
>
> ***These have been most beneficial in allowing me to keep more precise tabs on the ongoing academic progress of my students. I've been teaching 16 years, but all this training makes me feel like a rookie teacher again."***
>
> **Thom Antang,** dual immersion first-grade teacher at Blackford

Lorena Anaya-Pauly, bilingual first-grade teacher, is better able to document children's progress and finds her class to be more cohesive with fewer behavior problems. She appreciated the intensive staff development in early literacy, which included guided reading, interactive writing, shared reading, and literacy components. She views her documentation of the progress of individual children, in the form of detailed notes, as a tool that will be valuable to teachers in the second grade.

Parents Talk About the Difference in Smaller Classes

When asked for their impressions of the reduced class sizes, parents were quick to express satisfaction and support. Many highlighted similar benefits: individual attention that was now possible, the calmer, more relaxed atmosphere, the teacher's ability to track each child's progress and needs, and greater opportunities for children to participate and be noticed. Parents said:

- I'm thrilled with class size reduction. The classroom seems much more inviting–much more of a family-type environment than was possible in a class of 35 students. In the larger classes, a young child could get "lost in the crowd" or even be frightened.
- My impression is that, with smaller classes, each child receives more individual attention as well as opportunities to work in small groups. I am very pleased with the changes.
- It has made a difference both in my son's ability to concentrate and in my willingness to participate as a parent volunteer, which was completely exhausting in a larger class.
- Great! I think my child is flourishing academically since the teacher can focus on the needs of 20 instead of 30+! It's too bad that this class size can't continue through the primary grades.
- My child has benefited so much this year. She is less shy since there is more attention on the individual instead of always on the class as a whole.
- What a gift for our children–they deserve it!
- Fantastic! During conference time, it was evident that the teacher had really paid attention to my child's progress.
- I volunteer once a week. In the beginning of the year, the class size was 31 and I found it to be a strain on the teachers, and also on the kids because their needs weren't met quickly or at all. Now, everyone is so relaxed. I have seen a great deal more success in their class work and homework. Tasks are tended to on a daily basis instead of weekly, so the teacher is more aware of a student's progress.
- I get the impression she really knows my child.

- I don't see children forgotten or lost in the shuffle as I did when there were 31 children in the class.
- More order. Better environment for concentration. More individual attention. Better student participation.
- Our son is happy and well-adjusted and has more friends this year. More time is spent going over things, so he is absorbing more. He is a high maintenance child and needs stimulation. He has that and more in this class.
- As a parent, I have watched my second grader become much more involved with the classroom's goings-on. In her conversations with me about her day, she expresses what seems to be an increased awareness of classmates and an increased sense of belonging. Academically, I have seen her reading ability jump forward by leaps and bounds, an improvement I attribute to increased personal attention—a direct result of reduced class size.
- My son says, "Thumbs up!"

As Principal Pribyl walks through the campus, he sees general and specific results from smaller classes. Teachers are creating running records of students' reading abilities more frequently; they can do interventions more quickly; communication with families is more frequent; behavior problems occur less often due to changes in the dynamics of the classes; there is more hands-on learning; and certainly, there is less stress on teachers.

Pribyl would have appreciated more time to plan for the changes, especially to prepare parents for the shifts in classrooms and teachers. He also would like to see smaller class sizes for the third and fourth grades at his school. Pribyl finds little resentment among teachers in the upper grades because they know that the improved environments in grades 1-2 mean "they won't be dealing with such large learning gaps," he says.

Second-grade teachers at Blackford developed a consensus on the benefits of having 10 to 12 fewer children in their classes. The reduction in class size has meant: more individual attention per child, a calmer atmosphere, children who are more self-directed, a greater feeling of family, more space, more opportunity for children to respond and participate in activities, better opportu-

nities for anecdotal records and authentic assessment, and parents who are enthusiastic and want the program to continue.

Lessons Learned from Campbell School District

Superintendent Plumleigh acknowledges that the massive effort needed to implement reduced class sizes in her district was successful because of the environment that already existed. This includes:

- Collegiality: "We don't always agree, but we work from the same philosophy about children, every staff member is hard working, the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is incredible, and we are fiscally healthy."

- A strong focus on students; all decisions are made for what benefits them.

- Strategic planning for several years that created consensus around basic values; these were used to acculturate new teachers.

- A dynamic teaching staff with many new hires who infuse staff with energy; high teacher salaries attract excellent candidates.

- Staff development aligned with curriculum.

- A district-developed assessment program that is performance-based.

One advantage in Campbell, according to Associate Superintendent Gerry Chartrand, is that it is "growing its own teachers" through arrangements with San Jose State University. In both undergraduate and graduate programs, the campus is integrating the needs of the Campbell schools, such as its curriculum and assessment programs. Such leadership earned the district a large grant from the Noyce Foundation for early literacy profes-sional development. "The foundation knows that we deliver," Chartrand says emphatically.

With this kind of setting, the reduced class sizes in the early grades were worth the cost to Campbell. The per pupil expense in the district was $883, about $200 more than the state provided during school year 1996-97.

A more rational way to have used the money so quickly, according to Plumleigh, might have been to make investments in early childhood education and programs. Starting even earlier, she says, is essential because "new students coming into kindergarten don't have the background they need for learning."

Surveys conducted by the district among parents show considerable support for the district's decision to plunge into the initiative. They certainly noticed the change. The comments are full of observations such as "more time for each child," "better learning atmosphere," "class is calmer and more attentive," "more space to play and dance," and "made a difference in my child's ability to concentrate and my willingness to participate as a parent volunteer."

One parent compares the experience of her daughter to that of her slightly older son: "I have seen so many benefits to my child. She has come along so much faster than I would have imagined. She is reading and writing. Before the school year, she wasn't doing that. I feel overjoyed at her progress. I wish my son could have had this wonderful program. I think that all grades should have the privilege." Parent responses in general indicate that they would support expanding the smaller classes to all grades and would definitely not favor going back to larger ones.

District officials are concerned about the future, however. There is neither a pool of teachers nor additional space to expand the initiative further, says Plumleigh. The lack of an evaluation plan for the initiative by the state from the beginning means that its effects probably will not be captured. "I feel accountable to my community," says the superintendent. "We have to produce results for the sake of the health of our own organization."

Campbell Union 1997-98 Update

When asked about CSR-related activities in the fall of 1997, Plumleigh reported that the district has now fully implemented CSR in grades K-3. Space for the additional classrooms was already an issue the previous year, and Campbell is now "flat out of space." The cost of the initiative to the district is another very real concern. While the state is funding $800 per pupil for CSR, it is actually costing the district $1,100 per pupil this year. Plumleigh feels that the approach taken to determine whether a district receives money for a

CSR classroom–the 20:1 cap–has contributed to these costs for the district. Just as significant, it is also causing educational and community relations problems.

To ensure that their classes qualify for funding, Campbell started most classes with ratios of less than 20:1, but students continue to move into the district. Due to Campbell's space problems, a child newly enrolled in the district may have to be assigned to a school far away from his home if all classes in his or her grade are now at the 20:1 ceiling. While still supportive of smaller classes for children, Plumleigh characterizes the impact of the cap on student placement as a "nightmare." Parents whose children have been affected by a need to shift students between classes or to have them attend non-neighborhood schools have asked: "Is the money more important than my child?" But the district, already funding $300 per child from non-CSR money, will have to continue making these hard decisions as long as the cap approach is used to determine funding eligibility.

PARAMOUNT UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Land of Rapid Change and Instant Schools

K-12 district with 15,000 students;
12 K-8 schools and two secondary schools.

Experiencing rapid enrollment growth.

Fit class size reduction into the massive changes already planned.

Tim stretches his thin arms into the air and calms down long enough to sway in rhythm to the song his classmates softly tap out, syllable by syllable, with their teacher. Tim sings along, then dances and looks pleased. So does his teacher, Bev Davidson, who remembers when Tim entered her second-grade classroom at the Orange Avenue School six months earlier, unable to even recognize the alphabet. Living in a foster home and shuffled from school to school, Tim was both learning disabled and hyperactive, and Davidson worried that he was too far behind to catch up.

Tim, however, is one of the little miracles of the class size reduction initiative. Six months after he came into her classroom, Tim is able to read and write. "His writing has a purpose now," Davidson says, "because he can read." He no longer holds back, he tackles anything she asks of him, including singing in Japanese, as her class was doing this sultry June afternoon.

Davidson, 14 years a classroom teacher after former careers as a waitress and ski instructor, recalls what it was like before she had a smaller class. She expresses both relief at the change and regret that it wasn't made sooner.

"With 34 kids, I was so busy trying to run off copies, grade papers, or prepare lessons that I never ate lunch, and I was often at school until 7:00 p.m.," she says. Now, with only 20 students, "I can get to kids and meet their needs. I can actually do one-on-one instruction in the classroom. I used to have to do that before or after school."

She also can focus on problem learners, like Tim, and diagnose their learning needs. In a larger class, she says, Tim's needs either would not have been identified or she would not have had time to give him individual attention. She can plan interventions that she would have asked a specialist to do before. As another plus, Davidson feels that the smaller class size helps her to "be more consistent with children who do have special needs."

Watching Tim read in a circle of classmates and grin when they clap for him thrills Davidson. Hearing children read every day "is such a blessing," she says. She also can check the daily writing in journals. When her class was much larger, students did not write as often. She describes the January to June academic growth of the children in her class as "phenomenal."

Now a trainer of teachers for balanced literacy components, Davidson also is a resource for teachers in her K-3 grade level who are creating a balanced literacy program for the early grades. Thanks in part to the extra time, professional development, and smaller class size, they have success in the program.

The opportunity for her children to read and write every day under her watchful eyes means that she can pinpoint what strategy to use with each child. There are more phonics for a struggling reader and high-level questions for another student to help with comprehension. Without hesitating, Davidson says, "I am doing a much better job."

Add Children—and Stir

Davidson's lively classroom, full of visual stimulation for children learning to read, does not reflect the temporary look of Orange Avenue School, one of the district's "instant" schools created to ease overcrowding at other schools.

The school is overflowing with portable classrooms that are crowding the playground space. Its enrollment started at more than 900 and is growing rapidly.

Instant schools—created within three months using modular units—are a specialty of the Paramount Unified School District and its Assistant Superintendent for Business Services, Gene Hartline. He recently supervised the creation of one K-8 school in 56 days, with 24 classrooms initially and another three added for the 1997-98 school year.

When the class size reduction plan became a reality, Paramount was in the middle of preparing a long-range plan for expansion of the school district facilities. The permanent buildings are aging and dilapidated, and some portables are wearing thin after being used more than 40 years. Some elementary schools enroll as many as 1,500 students; six have at least 1,000 students. Even though the district has been growing at the rate of one school a year, the school board wanted to get all schools down to a more normal size. It relied on a total reconfiguration and year-round schools (all are now K-8 year-round schools), but the enrollment kept growing—to more than 15,000 students in 15 schools. A bond issue failed by only 200 votes in 1996, a much closer vote than a 1995 election effort. The board is hopeful about another vote in 1998.

To further complicate the space problems, the district's master plan called for instituting full-day kindergartens five years down the road. However, with state funding available, this provision was reviewed and changed. The district's population has grown to be 75 percent Hispanic and 89 percent at or below the poverty line. The academic value of kindergarten for such a diverse student enrollment became more and more obvious. Delaying a full kindergarten program for five years, Hartline estimated, would mean that 8,000 students would enter first grade during that time without the readiness offered by kindergarten classes (the district has 1,600 children in kindergarten each year). The planning group, led by the superintendent, asked Hartline, "Can we make it happen?"

Meanwhile, Hartline had some difficult decisions to present to the board and superintendent. Because of the exploding growth of the district, it might have been prudent to delay the CSR initiative, but Hartline recommended to the superintendent that they could afford to include first grade through third grade. "We needed to get in there and capture the entitlement for all three

grades, because it might not be available next year," he explains. Teachers, parents, and community members supported the idea, deciding that the facilities needs should be addressed for all three grade levels at once instead of piecemeal.

After estimating how many students would be at each site, Hartline calculated the district's need for portables and contacted rental companies. The school board wanted to avoid using space common to all students, such as libraries and computer rooms, as additional classrooms for CSR, so the district relied primarily on portables. Hartline amassed 60 rental classrooms as interim housing, plus 65 portables provided as short-term (up to five years) by the state or leased. At the same time, he made long-range plans for the reconstruction of one school, the building of three K-8 new schools, and purchase of 30 "permanent" relocatable classrooms. No libraries or computer labs were dismantled.

The Paramount school board undertook the risk of covering three grades because it used three sources of financing, according to Hartline. By capturing equalization aid, deficit reduction funding, and growth in funding of state categorical programs, the district could almost cover the estimated $1.1 million local cost of the class size reduction initiative.

It meant less of an increase in teachers' salaries, but Hartline said there was unanimous support for the plan. Secondary teachers might not have been as pleased with the idea as elementary teachers, but he points out that the cost-of-living wage increase was not touched, and anticipated increases in equalization aid could cover salary boosts.

With such a popular move in place—as well as the additional 20,000 teachers across the state hired for the smaller class sizes—Hartline is confident smaller class sizes in primary grades are here to stay. The next hurdle is to obtain adequate, or full, state funding.

While the initiative cost the district $781 per pupil in 1996-97, the estimated cost will rise to $1,087 within three years. Hartline's concern is that Paramount will be "robbing other programs to pay for this, as good as it is."

The Immediate Challenge: People and Their Preparation

Sara Thurber sometimes wonders if she should have come back from vacation last summer. She thought she would be returning as principal of the Hollydale School. Instead, she was assigned to be coordinator of the reduced class size program, a 10-week whirlwind experience filled with searches for space, teachers, materials, and time.

Since all K-8 schools are year-round and begin in July, there was some urgency to get teachers hired as soon as possible so they would miss as few paid contract days as possible. "We knew we were competing for teachers on traditional calendars who would receive a full year's pay." However, the district devised a plan for new teachers hired as part of the CSR initiative to substitute on other tracks when their track was out of school, giving them a full year's work and pay.

The search for teachers—75 for the smaller classes, a total of 120 for the school year—took Thurber and district officials to every pool they could find. They used up all of the substitute teachers, contacted teachers from parochial schools, worked with counselors at teacher preparation programs, and hired transfers from other districts where the initiative had not yet started.

Although the district was pleased with those it hired, Thurber found that many did not have full credentials and that some others with credentials had never taught. She was asked to shape a professional development program from the ground up, with a focus on the basics. Every new teacher was paired with a mentor, a partner teacher who helped with "everyday, nitty-gritty" things such as lunch count, parent conferences, and yard duty, as well as with instructional issues. "We provided a lot of teaming and buddy work," says Patti Cummings, education reorganization specialist at the time of the planning and now Coordinator of Facilities Planning. Delaying the changeover to smaller class sizes for two weeks until mid-November, the district planned to use the time for intensive preparation of the new teachers. The 10-day module for training included:

- basics of classroom management, discipline, and scheduling;
- planning lessons, understanding developmental growth of children, working with parents, and developing an appropriate classroom atmosphere;
- principles of good instruction (three days);

- teaching math;
- literacy instruction for LEP students;
- elements of a balanced literacy program;
- thematic instruction; and
- homework, grading, teaching organizational skills, and creating centers.

Some experienced teachers also attended the sessions; they were used to conduct breakout sessions during the training and to act as contacts for the new teachers during the year. In addition, "every teacher received two huge workbooks, and we told them they would not remember everything in them, but the important thing to know is that there were people in the district who were ready to help them," says Thurber.

As an additional support for new teachers, the district offered monthly follow-up sessions in which teachers could discuss problems and share ideas. Further, the new teachers were also involved in the district's staff development for all early grades teachers; the focus for the year was balanced literacy instruction.

Joyce Chan, a newly hired teacher, reflects positively on the Paramount approach to staff development. In addition to the formal sessions, she spent time in the classrooms of mentor teachers. She characterizes the assistance available from both mentor and other veteran teachers as "really great," and says she also found the support from other new teachers helpful. In her mind the staff development paid off–particularly the emphasis on teaching reading and the availability of daily sessions with a reading teacher for students having the greatest difficulty learning to read. Reading skills in her class improved so much that she "almost couldn't believe it."

Principals needed support, too, according to Thurber. In Paramount's year-round schools, there is no "down time" for school leadership. The rapid enrollment growth already overburdened principals, giving them more professional and support staff to supervise; class size reduction added to that load. Objectives to be used in evaluating the new teachers had to be adjusted due to the shorter work year, and all of these new teachers had to be evaluated.

At the same time that the principals' management burdens were increasing, the superintendent encouraged them to take more instructional leadership and to spend more than half of their time in classrooms, says Thurber.

Paramount Partner Teachers Provide Detailed Information

While much of the CSR staff development focused on instructional issues such as the elements of balanced literacy, the developmental levels of young children, and grading, the need of newly hired teachers to learn about other aspects of developing a smoothly run classroom were not forgotten. Each of the new teachers was assigned an experienced Partner Teacher who was responsible for providing information on activities such as taking attendance, developing behavior standards for students, and arrangement of furniture. The list of topics to be discussed was both detailed and comprehensive:

- Opening Activities: attendance, lunch count, morning routine
- General Knowledge: emergency procedures, ill/injured students, yard duty, obtaining supplies, using the copy machine, accessing the district print shop, signing in and out on site
- Record Keeping: progress reports, report cards, grading standards, K-2 checklist, site program on writing samples, student work portfolios
- Classroom Instruction: setting up and managing centers, obtaining and using literature sets, textbooks/manuals/courses of study, LEP students and ESL methods
- Classroom Environment: bulletin boards, arrangement of furniture, centers, student work, sharing with year-round education
- Classroom Management: developing and posting behavior standards consistent with the school site program, developing a system of rewards and consequences
- Student Review Team: knowledge of the process and how to access it, counselor intern and foster youth programs
- Office Support Staff: name and job of each member of the school office staff, name and duties of people such as the head custodian, cafeteria manager, and PTA president
- Support: site mentor teacher and literacy teacher, hours and how to use IMC
- Year-round Education: calendar, roving/rotation, pod schedule

They received additional classified support, and are now meeting twice a month with a trainer to discuss curriculum issues. "We also meet in clusters to help each other and form support networks," says Thurber, noting that three schools started the 1997-98 school year with new principals.

Almost every teacher in the Paramount district already knew what serious change was all about. Not only have the primary grades been reorganized, but the district has been in the process of easing all K-5 schools into K-8 configurations, eliminating the junior high organization. The ninth grade has recently become a separate campus adjacent to the 10-12 senior campus, to relieve overcrowding. "There was resistance to year-round schools and the K-8 grade organization at first from the teachers," says Cummings. "Teachers wanted to stay in their own rooms with their things, but now I don't think they would want to go back to the old system, and teacher absenteeism is down." Class size reduction meant more change for many of the teachers and principals, but the focus has remained on what is best for children and people are doing whatever it takes to make CSR work.

There is good news in more than Bev Davidson's smaller second grade. Based on abundant anecdotal evidence, Thurber and Cummings report that student attendance is up, behavior problems are down, students are receiving much more individual attention, and teachers are able to use their space for more center-type activities and more hands-on experiences for children. For principals, one of the first indicators of successful change has been a new "calmness" in classrooms and campuses.

Paramount 1997-98 Update

As of November, Paramount Unified had expanded its CSR program to include all kindergarten classes, a move that added approximately 20 classes across the 12 elementary schools. Most of the schools were able to accommodate the expansion by providing both a morning and afternoon kindergarten on every track and by implementing a year-round rover/rotation schedule. The rover/rotation schedule is really an either/or option selected by teams of four teachers, only three of whom work during a trimester. If the rover option is used, three of the four teachers are assigned a permanent classroom and the fourth moves to the classroom assigned to a teacher on vacation. The master contract for teachers at Paramount includes an interesting provision: no new teacher will be assigned the rover position unless he or she re-

quests it. The rotation option has all four teachers, only three of whom are working during a trimester, cycle through three classrooms. Teachers who have selected this option often design the bulletin boards, etc., of each classroom around themes, with a teacher moving to a theme appropriate to his or her next unit of instruction.

The district continues to support CSR as "an investment in the future of our children," but also recognizes the impact of the program on current and future space needs. Although construction of a new "design-build" K-8 school is scheduled for completion in July 1998, classroom space will still be at a premium. The design and construction process for "design-build" schools begins with "predesigned" architectural plans that are meant to capitalize on modular components. Designed to be space-, cost-, and time-efficient, these schools can be built relatively quickly and are generally less expensive than one that begins with a custom design.

Projected annual enrollment growth of three to four percent coupled with CSR means that more schools will be needed to meet future needs and to ease overcrowding in some schools.

SURPRISE VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Where "Small" Has Always Been the Challenge

K-8 school with 158 students.

Two-thirds of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Uses smallness to build cohesion and give individual attention.

Mel Soletti's sunny office at the front of the low-slung elementary school is especially busy. The school secretary is off gassing up the school bus, so the principal is fielding more phone calls than usual. He reminds a student where his lunch bag was left; gives permission for a student to go home because the sheep have gotten out of their pen; and notes that the Parent Action Club still has t-shirts for sale. The physical education teacher comes looking for equipment stored in Soletti's office. Someone reports sighting a mountain lion not too far beyond the ridge that borders the little town of Cedarville.

Earlier, Soletti had started the day by running up the flags. Later, he will put the lunches into the oven.

Welcome to Surprise Valley Elementary School, one of three schools in the Surprise Valley Joint Unified School District.

Tucked into the far northeast corner of the state, Surprise Valley *is* somewhat of a surprise. Coming up from the South and the most convenient airport at Reno, Nevada, one passes alkaline lakes and travels through dry mountains until dipping down into the valley around Cedarville, or takes a more easterly route by bordering the western reaches of the Great Basin on the Nevada side until reaching the valley. Either way, there is no doubt that this is the rural West—an isolated, closely knit region, where people are very dependent on the land and on each other.

The son of second-generation Italian immigrants, Soletti has spent his entire life in rural northern California. He left the principalship of a large high school in Etna to get away from job pressure and to enjoy raising a second family. His dawn-to-dusk work at the Surprise Valley Elementary School may be hectic, but the 158-student, K-8 school suits him fine.

As in rural districts throughout the state, the student enrollment at Surprise Valley can change dramatically with the departure or the in-migration of only a few families. Soletti's school lost two families and eight children last year, a change that would hardly be a blip in a larger school district. At his school, however, it could have meant juggling classes, losing a teacher, and combining two grades at the primary level into a class of 26 students.

Thanks to the class size reduction program, the school had the resources to maintain a full teaching staff and small classes, as well as continue its emphasis on professional development that is helping the staff work with students individually.

Because of its circumstances, the Surprise Valley school had adequate facilities for smaller class sizes in the primary grades, having depended on a row of portable classrooms for some time. It was luckier than most rural schools in that a teacher was available. It is not always that easy to fill teaching slots at Surprise Valley and, according to preliminary studies of the class size reduction initiative, in most rural districts. "People may think they want to teach in a rural district," observes Soletti, "but it looks different once you get out here. Our winters are really rough."

Some teachers, however, wouldn't want to be any place else. Surprise Valley's first-grade teacher, for example, drives 150 miles a day round trip from her home in Lakeview, Oregon, in order to teach in a small school devoted to continuously improving instruction through professional development.

What Surprise Valley has to teach other schools about smaller class sizes is not how to gear up to meet a big challenge, or rearrange space, or recruit teachers, but what you do with small classes. "Class size is no panacea," says Soletti. "There are no quick fixes to making a kid a reader and a writer. You will not get good results, no matter how small the class is, if you don't have good instruction."

Surprise Valley's efforts have three major elements:

- high-quality professional development;
- individual attention to children; and
- a cohesive staff that agrees philosophically and works together well.

High-Quality Professional Development

Professional development for the Surprise Valley teachers comes at a personal price. Last summer it meant rising early to climb into a van together—all K-6 teachers, the special education teacher, and Soletti—to make the 80-mile drive to Tulelake for a one-week course on teaching reading. Because they were day-trippers, the professional development only cost $100 per teacher plus gas and lunch. Even then, the board only approved the expense because the school got professional development help through the class size initiative. The district also used migrant education funds to help pay for the teachers' workshops on keeping running records of children's reading growth.

The teachers have attended follow-up workshops at Alturas, somewhat closer. But it still means a long ride after school twice a month from September through January. The staff also attended a reading conference together at Redding.

Terri Jacobson, sixth-grade teacher, participated in the staff development even though it was aimed at the primary grades "because I wanted to see what I could adapt for low readers in my class." The basic skills that students

need–reading, writing, grammar, spelling–are all the same, she notes, and "by working together, we are building a scaffolding for them throughout all the grades."

The professional development on teaching children to read that Judy Hill found at Surprise Valley "is the most I have ever had and made the most sense." A veteran teacher–the one who drives over the mountains from Oregon everyday–she found that the background she was receiving on assessing children's reading abilities and on providing a varied approach to teaching reading was like nothing she had ever had before. She characterizes the mix of strategies used–phonics, whole language, writing, literature–as a wise balance. "I got feedback, and after a while, it all came together," she says.

Individual Attention

Hill's training and the small class size saved one of her students from early failure. For a while, the teacher was fooled by the first grader's ability to memorize words, but Hill began to pick up clues through constant assessments, decided to use some diagnostic tools with the student, and learned that she really was getting behind in her decoding skills. The child was placed in a Reading Recovery program. Says Hill, "In a large class her problems probably would have gone unidentified."

She once taught a first-grade class of 32 students, remembering the time as "not a rewarding experience." Small class size "allows me to know where every kid is" and helps to ensure that no student "falls through the cracks"–views echoed by other teachers in the school.

Despite the small community and relative homogeneity of the predominately white student body (about 25 students come from an Indian reservation and a few Hispanic and Asian students are part of the mix), the students enter school with quite varied literacy experiences. Some "don't even know how to open books," says Jacobson; others, such as those with parents working for the Bureau of Land Management, may be well-prepared for reading. The staff doesn't believe in pull-out programs, "and is not willing to give up on any child," says Soletti.

The principal can spread out sheets that tell him where every child is in reading. All students are tested three times a year. These formal assessments

will be administered quarterly in the 1997-98 school year because Soletti has chosen to go with a computerized reading test that provides diagnostic information for teachers and parents more frequently than before.

"We are like medics," he explains. "We need to be able to tell parents where their kids are in reading all the time." Almost all Surprise Valley parents attend parent-teacher conferences, and reports providing information on each child's academic status and progress are used during these meetings as well as by teachers in their classrooms.

The commitment of parents to their children's education is demonstrated in another way that might be envied by many other schools. Of the 158 children attending Surprise Valley Elementary, 70 had perfect attendance records at the end of the fall quarter.

This record is particularly impressive since some of the children, commuting from across the Nevada border as tuition students, board the school bus before 7:00 a.m. and do not get home until 4:00 p.m. Although the primary children ride the same bus as the older students, they have no formal classwork for the last hour and are supervised at the school. This schedule gives the primary teachers time for a prep period together.

The staff and Soletti approve of ability grouping "only for specific purposes and for a limited time." A goal is to avoid placing any child in special education until the fourth grade unless absolutely necessary.

The school provides individual support as much as possible. For example, Soletti doesn't buy textbooks for whole classes anymore; he breaks up the purchases into differentiated reading levels, buying perhaps a half-dozen copies of each text. Students with reading difficulties not only work with a Reading Recovery specialist but also have a special reading hour at the end of the day. First graders are paired with seventh graders who tutor and write books about their young charges.

Although Surprise Valley Elementary is very small, attention has been given to providing students with both library books and technology. In addition to the books housed in the school, the students visit the library in the high school every two weeks. The old computers the school was using when Soletti came seven years ago are now workstations in K-3 classes; new resources, such as the block grant from the state, went into furnishing a computer lab and acquiring three Internet stations for student use.

Cohesiveness of Staff

Research on school reform indicates that student progress is best helped by a school environment where everyone agrees on goals and supports each other in expecting more from students. Surprise Valley Elementary could write the research reports. That hasn't always been the case. When Soletti first came to the school, the staff had given up basal readers, "and everyone was doing something different."

Gradually, through shared professional development and Soletti's insistence on knowing the progress of every child, the staff has come together. Teachers agreed on a common math program taught by levels, not grades; they use the Accelerated Reader program from K through 8; and they are willing to ride miles together in search of more knowledge and skills. Soletti accompanies the teachers for professional development. "If I ask the teachers to do something, I need to be knowledgeable about it," he says.

The shared experience through professional development means that "teachers can help each other because they have all had the same training," according to the principal. The Learning for Literacy courses at Tulelake, for example, "started to give all of the teachers the same language about reading instruction."

During the last school year, Soletti observed that teachers were using a wider range of reading techniques, including work with word families and more focused efforts to analyze the source of errors made by individual students by using running record assessment. He attributes higher reading achievement and a narrowing of the range of student achievement obtained by the end of the school year to the common professional development and the efforts of teachers to use in their classrooms the things they learned. For example, all third graders had made at least a year's worth of progress in reading, and all were promoted to the fourth grade.

A cohesive staff doesn't mean that there are no disagreements, Soletti is quick to point out. "But this staff works extremely hard and is dedicated to making sure every child succeeds."

Currently, the continued erosion of jobs in the Cedarville area—downsizing of federal land management and mining staffs and the closure of a mine—is threatening the future of the Surprise Valley school's balanced program. The staff hopes that the class size reduction program will help to prevent a return to extremely large class sizes, even if classes must be combined in the future.

After learning the ropes in his elementary school job, Soletti now understands why so many of his former high school students were in academic trouble. They never learned to read adequately in the lower grades. "I have learned utmost respect for those who teach reading," he says.

Soletti firmly believes the state has put its resources in the right place through the class size reduction program, but if there is to be any other initiative, he and the teachers at Surprise Valley would vote for it to go into better teacher preparation programs. Although the teachers at Surprise Valley have all received training in specific approaches, the staff realizes that children learn to read in a variety of ways—no one method works for all children. They are also unanimous in their agreement that it took the state's new emphasis on primary-grade instruction, and the resources that came with it, to provide them with many of the skills and knowledge they should have had when they began teaching.

Surprise Valley 1997-98 Update

Surprise Valley Elementary began the 1997-98 school year with 151 students, seven fewer than when the school was visited the previous year. With the lack of employment opportunities in the area, this enrollment decline is likely to continue, and every student lost will have a significant impact on the school and its programs. Last year the CSR funding made it possible for Surprise Valley to maintain its single-grade class structure rather than moving some grades to combination classes, but the funding will not be enough to counter any future enrollment losses.

On a more positive note, Surprise Valley continues its emphasis on staff development to improve reading and writing instruction and on the use of computerized reading instruction/assessment. This year, the entire staff will have two days of targeted staff development, with five teachers participating in an additional three days while the other teachers and Principal Mel Soletti staff classrooms.

When he was interviewed in the fall of 1997, Soletti reported that the first quarter parent conferences had just been completed. Parents of second- through eighth-grade students, plus those of first graders who were already reading, received computerized reading profiles for their students. Each student, with the assistance of his or her teacher, developed reading goals, read

materials independently, took computerized tests on the reading, and then received feedback on their areas of growth and those that needed more work. In addition to providing progress/status reports for parents and teachers, Soletti feels that the program is helping these early-grades students develop more responsibility for their own academic progress.

GLENDALE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Partnership Classrooms; Portables to Suit

K-12 district with 30,000 students,
19 elementary and eight secondary schools.

Partnership classrooms, support for beginning teachers.

Extensive facilities planning, short- and long-term.

Serendipity describes class size reduction for the Glendale Unified School District. Events happened too fast for comfort. School officials worried about the lack of planning. And people were just plain exhausted by the enormous tasks that kept rolling through the door. But by the end of the 1996-97 school year, the district looked at what it had done and realized the effort not only was good for young children, but also had rippled benefits throughout the system.

Because of the district's work on smaller class sizes, it enhanced its role as a training site for the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program. Experienced teachers took notice of instructional strategies practiced by the new teachers, who had received special training designed to take advantage of smaller classes. The district began to build cadres of teachers willing to pair with each other in the smaller classes. And it speeded up plans

for new facilities, even contracting for the construction of "bungalows" designed by district officials for their unique needs.

"Sometimes it's just better to jump in," observes Dick White, Director of Facilities and Support Operations for the district, who faced the gargantuan task of making room for the reduced class size effort. "If you sit around and debate the issues, it may be months before you come to a decision."

Glendale, like the rest of the state, had only days to make a number of decisions. The 30,000-student district, gerrymandered around the Verdugo Mountains so that it looks like two districts on the map, set first grade as its priority. This meant hiring 50 additional teachers, meshing the new teachers' training with the district's overall plan for beginning teacher support and assessment, and finding space. To solve some of these problems, Glendale turned to partnership classrooms in several schools, receiving waivers to place two teachers with 32 students in one classroom. All of this came about through hasty but thorough planning.

Including Everyone in the Planning Process

The Glendale district had hesitated to spend too much time and effort on planning for reduced class size in advance, because "we didn't think it would come to be," says Joann Merrick, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services. When what had seemed only remotely possible became reality, the district quickly swung into action. The district's long-held belief in the value and power of collaboration helped to determine the first step to be taken.

Superintendent James Brown and his administrators pulled together a planning committee with parents, principals, and representatives of the human resources, budget, and facilities divisions of the district. Although it is a common practice in the district to involve representatives of the community and staff on committees dealing with important issues, this situation was special. What was unusual about the committee was that it also included the full negotiating team of the teachers' union—high school teachers as well as those from elementary and middle schools.

Having secondary teachers on the planning team, says Merrick, provided a more balanced viewpoint on several of the more controversial issues. "For example, we were putting lots of dollars into programs for a few grade levels, and there was a possibility that this could be seen as setting up a 'have and

have-not' situation." However, the mutual planning allowed for healthy discussion and the expression of a variety of viewpoints. As a result, everyone was sensitized to important issues, and it was possible to "gain support for the message that future secondary students were going to be much better prepared," she says.

Moreover, including the union in the planning was necessary, in the opinion of school district officials. "There were contractual decisions, such as transfers, that we were able to work through more effectively since all the parties were at the table," says Merrick.

After evaluating estimates from each affected school on the number of teachers, students, new teachers needed, and transfers, the planning committee recommended to the board that the district:

- focus on reducing class sizes in the first grade;
- hire 50 additional teachers;
- use existing space, such as libraries, where possible; and
- seek waivers for two-teacher classes in schools wanting to include second grade in the effort.

Many principals were on vacation, requiring the district to set up school panels to interview and hire new teachers. The review panel selection process was not as intensive as the process a principal would normally conduct, admits Merrick, "but this was an emergency. We had to get moving in order to get the teachers we wanted."

Merrick also points to a dilemma faced by Glendale, as well as other districts in the state. Although districts are legally permitted to introduce the CSR program on a school-by-school basis, reducing class sizes in one school and not another raises issues of equity and access. Questions such as this—plus the additional difficulties encountered by those Glendale schools that were on a year-round schedule, making decisions about the 1997-98 school year while just beginning to adjust to the changes needed for 1996-97, and the financial impact of CSR on district funds—all made for a complex, fast-paced year. In Merrick's words, "it's been a wild ride, and it's not over yet."

Investing in Teachers

Glendale's reputation helped it recruit teachers. Not only is its pay scale inviting, but the district's emphasis on support for teachers and professional development attracts candidates for teaching positions.

Since 1988, the district has been piloting support systems for new teachers. It was among the first of the initial 15 districts using the state's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program. A structured way of inducting new teachers, this program includes individual growth plans, mentoring by experienced teachers, and a final assessment.

Forty of the 67 slots in BTSA for the 1996-97 school year went to teachers hired for the class size reduction program. When the district moved the initiative into second grade at mid-year, another 20 teachers became part of the BTSA program.

Glendale already had hired 100 new teachers for the year even before the class size reduction program. About half of the new teachers, among both the regular hires and the 50 rushed hires for first and second grades, lacked permanent credentials. These teachers were given preference in the BTSA program. Of the 67 total teachers in the program during the school year, the school district retained all but three at the end of the year.

Teachers going into the smaller classes received the usual orientation, "but we had the luxury of working with them for an additional two weeks outside the classroom," says Suzanne Riley, Coordinator of Professional Development. In addition to the new teacher orientation typically done in Glendale, the new CSR teachers attended a specially designed program for one week. Mentor teachers made presentations to the new teachers, the new teachers observed other teachers, and then they came back together for discussion and reflection the next week.

New teachers also were teamed with the teachers they would replace, allowing them to observe and work with their future students along with the experienced teachers. At the beginning of their third week, students and teachers alike were assigned to their 20-to-1 classrooms.

The BTSA program adds a great deal of substance to professional development for new teachers. At Glendale, those headed for classrooms for the first time discuss everything together, from making individual plans for the

first day to what it means to be a "good" teacher–the knowledge, skills, and abilities they should have. They receive help on classroom management, grouping, assessment, parent involvement, and responding to individual student needs.

The funding provided through BTSA is also a help since CSR legislation mandated, but did not specifically fund, staff development. The district also used funding from Goals 2000 and the Reading Initiative to pay for the intensive staff development program geared toward helping both new and experienced teachers make the most of the smaller classes.

"We wanted to instill the culture that they are in a district where we help each other," says Riley. She considers the initiative to reduce class size to be "powerful" for all primary-grade teachers because it strongly focuses on providing individualized instruction. "It's exciting to see that all teachers involved in CSR have the opportunity to see and try new and different teaching strategies," according to Riley.

The district's preparation of new teachers also encourages sharing and networking among teachers, creating sustained professional development. In the past, Riley says, teachers rarely talked about needing professional training, but teachers and principals are now buying into the benefits of "working together in a structured environment."

The staff development for teachers going into smaller second-grade classes had a special emphasis. Teachers selected for this next step, phased in at mid-term, had to feel comfortable with teaming with another teacher. The only way the district could find room for a second-grade initiative was to create partnership classrooms with 32 students and two teachers.

Before going into their classrooms, these teachers worked together on the positive aspects of teaming and such practicalities as the division of labor. They had to solve problems such as: How do we set aside time for joint planning? What content should be divided? How will we keep records and who grades which papers? How do we deal with personal preferences on neatness? If the school doesn't provide what we need/want, how will we get it?

Edison Elementary School: Answering the Questions

Sidnie Myrick, an experienced teacher who trains other teachers at California State University, Los Angeles, and Deborah Shaw, a new teacher who interned at Edison Elementary School, fit together in teaching like some of the jigsaw puzzle pieces that entertain their first- and second-grade students. They couldn't be more pleased with their first year of teaming together at Edison, and they can tick off all of the advantages quickly. As Myrick sees it, the arrangement provides:

- **Greater flexibility.** "There are management things that before I would have had to stop everyone to do. Now, I can take a child outside for special help and the teaching goes on."
- **More parent involvement.** "I have time to contact parents immediately."
- **Individual attention to students.** Instead of three reading groups, for example, their class can accommodate six reading groups, allowing students to move more quickly into another group that fits their gradation in reading ability instead of waiting for a larger reading group. Students who need extra time for instruction are often able to receive it during the regular day while, in the past, much of the tutoring had to happen after school. Myrick points to one indicator of the effectiveness of this increased attention: "Every child who came to us not reading is now reading."
- **Easier planning and more resources.** Myrick always maintained a large classroom library, but now it has doubled.
- **Better mentoring.** Edison is a training site for student teachers from three campuses, and Myrick finds it much easier to mentor these teachers with a partner teacher in the room. Shaw, who worked in Myrick's classroom the previous year as an intern teacher, also received an extra year of mentoring.
- **Better student assessment.** Before, says Myrick, reading assessments of individual students had to be done in the classroom "with lots of noise around." Now, she or Shaw can take a child out of the classroom to assess his or her reading.

Having smaller reading groups "makes a huge difference" when working with children on writing as well as reading skills, according to Shaw. "Last year I couldn't have had children writing chapters in books or doing biogra-

phies from books," she says. "I saw these same kids last year, and I know how far they have been able to progress in one year."

The benefits of the smaller group—a maximum of six children as compared to 10 or 11 last year—are obvious as Shaw sits with her reading circle. They read together and individually; she checks their writing constantly and always has time to answer questions and to ask questions that help them get started writing.

Edison's willingness to take on student teachers—typically 24 from the University of Southern California each year—gave Principal Joanna Junge an advantage when she needed to hire eight additional teachers in a hurry. (She already had five new ones coming on board.) She and her staff had already decided which student teachers they wanted to hire for their school, although she had to maneuver through the district's lottery system for new teachers. Because of the school's preference for partnership classes, Junge only needed to find one new classroom. Yet, even that wasn't easy because she has 1,100 students at a school built for 400. Portables fill half of the playground space and cannot accommodate the partnership classrooms because they are not large enough.

This problem, plus the preference of some teachers for single classrooms and a year-round schedule, have made Junge a superb juggler of teachers and space. In the 1997-98 school year, she is managing an astounding array of primary-grade classrooms: two first grades with a teacher-student ratio of 1-20; three combos of grades 1-2 with a ratio of 2-32; one combo of grades 1-2 with a ratio of 1-20; five classrooms that are ungraded through grade three with a ratio of 2-32; three combos of grades 2-3 with a ratio of 2-32; and one classroom that combines grades 1-3 with a ratio of 1-20.

Junge is very supportive of partnering arrangements such as that used in the Myrick-Shaw classroom, and she firmly believes that it is the teacher-student ratio that makes the difference. Merely adding an aide in a classroom with one teacher will not get the same benefits.

Tireless and always optimistic, Junge nevertheless admits that such arrangements make planning more complicated and require much more time. Not only is her supervisory work overloaded, but the expansion is a strain on maintenance, custodial, and other support staff. With supplies in sheds, student bookbags left outside classroom doors, and benches in the open hallways for individual work, Edison was already bulging at the seams. Class

size reduction meant less space for all adults, she points out. She praises the support of the district and the morale of her staff, "but there are things that people probably didn't think about early enough."

As Junge walks around her school, filled primarily with minority students from a low-income neighborhood, she forgets some of the problems. She sees teachers learning how to use smaller groups for better teaching, especially in reading and math; more hands-on activities for youngsters; and better diagnosis of student needs. Such improvements are not universal across all of her classrooms, but she now has the momentum in her school to ensure that classrooms "will not be business as usual with fewer students." The most important impact, she says, will be greater skill by teachers in diagnosing and meeting student needs.

Meeting the Facilities Challenge: Plotting Every Step Is the Key

Dick White, Director of Facilities and Support Operations, sits in the sheltered lunch area at Mann Elementary School with a pile of sheets spread out in front of him. He is trying to decide on answers to such questions as where to put portables so they have the least impact on the playground...how to build a new kindergarten area so there can be a larger sheltered area where the kindergarten is now...where to put a new parking area...whether the portables should be permanent or temporary...how much more maintenance help the school will need...how to ensure that the portables will be ready when school opens (he has only a three-day window between final set-up and opening day).

White's sheets help him answer all these questions because he has plotted every step of the way, from architectural design, to breaking up and removing old asphalt to accommodate new portables, to placing and landscaping the units. Working on 18 sites at one time, White needs to have the tasks and timetables in front of him at all times. "After I spent a long weekend away from phones putting all the data into charts," he says, "I realized I was already behind schedule."

Although the Glendale schools struggled through the first year of the CSR program with minimal impact on facilities, the next steps are extremely complicated. Passage of a bond issue for new or renovated buildings was a tremen-

dous boost for the growing school district, but it meant that White had to fit additional space for the smaller class sizes in the primary grades into an overall facilities plan to enable the CSR initiative to move to all second grades.

"I have bungalows that are 40 years old," he notes, "and our concern is to provide greater equity for the inner-city schools where most of the portables are located." The district's goal is to balance enrollment in elementary schools, keeping the maximum for any school around 800 students. As part of this plan, some schools, like Edison, will get a whole new campus; others will be renovated.

When White went looking for portables, he found that larger districts had options on everything available. He turned to a manufacturer who would build portables to new specifications, giving him 30 units, or 60 classrooms, adequate for the partnership classrooms. The portables come self-contained and are designed to avoid "the bad experiences we have had in the past." Maintenance people helped design them, so the units have pre-built public address, alarm, light, and phone systems. Instead of mechanical clocks, the units use battery-driven ones that require a quick change of batteries twice a year rather than lengthy repairs. Anticipating Internet hookups, the units have plugs around the room; all are air-conditioned.

The effort is costing the district about $4 million plus an additional $200,000-$300,000 in district labor costs, with state reimbursement expected to be only $1 million.

Then White had to decide where to put the portable units, anticipating whether they will be only temporary until new construction provides greater space, or whether they will be around for a long time. Although the district's goal is to eventually eliminate all portables, White is not convinced that can happen, especially if the district enrollment continues to grow. "We need to minimize their impact as the short-term goal," he says.

Working around the clock to open school with space for all children, White credits the team effort for the district's ability to make such tremendous changes. "Everyone got involved," he says, remembering that one teacher didn't even complain when she had only a day's notice to move out of a portable that was being relocated. "We all want to make it happen, so we're doing whatever it takes to get the job done."

Planning for Evaluation

The rapid implementation of the reduced class sizes in first and second grades caught the district, as well as the state, off guard in terms of evaluating the effort. Once over the initial crisis, school officials had to play catch-up on planning to measure the effects of the smaller class sizes.

Merrick fears that, without good data showing benefits, policy makers will come back and question the wisdom of the investment. Glendale decided to focus on summative evaluation for the first year of the initiative because baseline assessment data were not available. It put together an assessment plan that includes running records of children's reading in books that are at different levels in three languages. The district provides instruction in Armenian in four schools, as well as Spanish language development in many schools.

Teams of teachers, administrators, and parents in each school are collecting this summative data and field testing assessment instruments, according to Mary McKee, Director of Instructional Support Services. These efforts are being combined with norm-referenced testing in second grade and in first grade in some Title I schools. Testing among primary-grade teachers "tends to be intuitive and informal," she explains. "We are now trying to standardize it and help teachers with strategies for constant classroom assessment."

This move to use classroom assessments more skillfully would not have come about so quickly without the professional development around the smaller class sizes, McKee adds. She feels that assessment is now viewed as an integral part of instruction.

Because of that development, McKee believes that even if the district were forced to return to large classes, "these teachers would remain better at using assessments and materials." Another serendipitous happening in Glendale, she says, is the strong networking among staff with similar jobs—both teachers and administrators—developing across the district. "You can't go to a meeting anymore without a group in a corner asking, 'What are you doing?' It's just like kindergarten. We are all holding hands."

Glendale 1997-98 Update

About 60 more teaching stations were needed in Glendale this year. In 1996-97, CSR was implemented district-wide in first grade, with some second grades also included in the program. This year, all first and second grades were included, with 10 of the 19 elementary schools requesting a waiver from the school board that would allow them to expand CSR to either kindergarten or third grade. All the waivers were granted, and these schools are looking for the additional teachers needed.

Glendale's CSR committee has continued to meet, with its recommendations having an impact on how CSR is implemented in the district. For example, the committee recommended against the use of 40-to-2 classrooms, even though space for additional classrooms was harder and harder to find. The district's experience with a few 32-to-2 classrooms on an experimental basis during the first year of CSR had been positive. This approach is now the preferred option if a large enough classroom is available when the addition of a new child would mean breaking the 20-to-1 cap. While most classes are still 20-to-1, Glendale has thus far been able to use the 32-to-2 approach as an alternative and has no 40-to-2 classes.

While elementary school principals continue to highlight the positive effects of CSR on children and teachers, many aspects of their jobs have become more difficult. CSR has meant not only more teachers for each principal to supervise and evaluate, it has meant a disproportionate number of new teachers who must be observed and evaluated more often. Joann Merrick, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, has projected the potential impact of a fully implemented CSR (kindergarten through third grade) on the district's principals. For one of Glendale's larger elementary schools, from 17 to 20 more teachers would be included on the staff as compared to pre-CSR days. Merrick sees the need for additional administrative support for the district's principals, a move that would add another unexpected cost to the financial balance sheet of CSR-related activities.

Glendale also has begun to plan for the 1998-99 school year. In order to address needs for more space, an elementary school that had been leased will be reopened. In addition to the loss of lease revenue, the district needed to spend additional dollars for renovation of the facility and now faces the often difficult and unpopular task of making school boundary changes. While a tough decision, this "new" building should mean that no additional portables will be needed for next year at the seven neighboring schools.

LOS ALAMITOS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Going Full Circle: Planning Through Assessment

K-12 district with 8,000 students, 25 percent minority.

High-achieving district that keeps pushing.

Exemplary professional development for early literacy.

Carefully crafted internal and external assessment plan.

"What will it look like?" "How will we know and report the results?"

When administrative staff of the Los Alamitos Unified School District first met to map out emergency plans for reducing class sizes, these questions were as much on their minds as the issues of how they would find teachers and space. It was a fitting discussion for this 8,000-student district on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The leaders always are pushing the envelope, setting higher expectations for teachers and students, and providing the support for meeting them.

Compared to larger, more diverse districts, Los Alamitos could organize smaller classes in the primary grades without much difficulty. Its students are fairly homogeneous (less than 25 percent are minority) and high-

achieving. With only 11 schools, the district operates more as a close community than a bureaucracy.

Those responsible for the planning and implementation, however, might not have thought the road ahead would be smooth in mid-summer of 1996. They needed 10 portables and 31 new teachers plus materials and furniture. Los Alamitos' exemplary professional development needed to expand and target new teachers in the primary grades. The district, which has been developing expertise in a home-grown assessment system, also was determined to document the effects of the initiative. This would be especially important at the end of the school year after state officials began to ask school districts for plans on assessing the CSR program.

Organizing for Change

When the opportunity to create smaller classes in the primary grades seemed sure, Los Alamitos pulled together its elementary management team of principals, mentor teachers, and district specialists. Because of the priorities of the district, the team first worked out a staff development plan. It should focus on what a class of 20-1 would look like, they decided. A few weeks later this same group, plus teachers from grades K-3, sat down together to ask the question again. The answers framed the vision of a 20-1 classroom that would be the core of the district's professional development.

The group turned to immediate decisions:

- The initiative would extend through third grade.
- The goal would be to make sure that all children were reading at grade level by the end of the third grade.
- Changes in responsibilities would focus on support for teachers. The principal of a new school that was opening two grades at a time was appointed new teacher coordinator for half of her time. Learning specialists in the elementary schools were detailed to be staff development coordinators half-time at the district level.
- The district would wait for "really good portables," even though it meant some teachers doubled up on space until January.

The district did not have to hire any teachers on emergency credentials, according to Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services Lorene Gonia. In addition, the new teachers met the district's regular criteria other than credentials–a quality interview and demonstration of performance. Of those hired for the class size reduction program, only four were not retained at the end of the school year, she says. Space-wise, music teachers lost their rooms, and space was shared with extended daycare programs that use classrooms early in the morning and after school.

Although the district would have liked more time for thoughtful planning, its first year with smaller class sizes went well, according to Gonia.

Staff Development Tailored for Smaller Classes

The brainstorming about what a smaller class would look like and what the teacher would try to do framed the district's Balanced Literacy Staff Development Project. One of those in charge of shaping the professional development, Bea Tamo, Learning Specialist at Weaver Elementary School, believes that without a well-trained teacher, "the smaller classes won't make any difference." The district's literacy development encouraged all K-3 teachers to think differently about their instruction. For example, in brainstorming sessions they decided that a teacher in a smaller class could:

- have more time to be a "kid watcher";
- know more about the children;
- individualize instruction better;
- be more available to the children;
- increase parent communication and connections;
- be less frazzled and fragmented;
- be better at orchestrating and assessing learning; and
- be more able to model behaviors and hold high expectations.

Students in smaller classes, the educators decided, would:

- have more opportunities for conferences and interactions with their teachers;
- have more opportunities for guided writing;
- use more oral language;

- have more guided reading time;
- have more student time with the teacher for individualized editing of writing; and
- have more opportunities for guided and shared reading, peer interaction, and experiences in critical thinking and acquiring comprehension skills.

This vision of a balanced literacy program in smaller classes formed the basis of the district's first stage of professional development. Teachers took these ideas and compared them to other sources, including the state's reading initiative. They modified the district's existing language arts program, which already had a strong emphasis on literacy and which had never abandoned the use of phonics as one component of reading instruction, to fit with the new vision.

In stage two of the professional development, the district realized that teachers wanted special help on guided reading for students who were having problems. It provided experts who presented one full day of work on guided reading and diagnostic skills for the teachers. Contributing expertise were teachers trained in Reading Recovery, which the district adopted more than five years ago, and those familiar with the Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project.

This development day was followed by three half-day peer coaching sessions on running records and other strategies at each school. Each new teacher observed the sessions with his or her own coach, or mentor, who explained what was happening. Then the new teachers and their coaches teamed up to teach with the skills covered in the session. In Gonia's words, "We reinvented what it truly means to do an in-depth running record."

Throughout the rest of the school year, seven professional development days focused on helping teachers get better at a balanced literacy program in each classroom. "We beefed up staff development throughout the system because of the reduced class size initiative," says Gonia. "We asked ourselves about our vision—for example, could we do more with Reading Recovery and with diagnosis of problems."

Teachers in each of the district's elementary schools were also asked about what they perceived to be their staff development needs; this assessment guided the selection of topics for the year. The program that was developed was a rich one. Teachers could choose to work on interactive writing; reading and writing workshops; literature circles; guided reading with fluent

Teachers Ask: "What Do I Know?" "What Do I Want to Learn?"

One way in which Los Alamitos teachers were asked about their staff development needs was through use of a form that asked, simply, "What do I know" and "What do I want to learn" about literacy instruction?One teacher's responses are included below:

What I Know	What I Want to Learn
• Guided reading instruction for small, homogeneous groups	• How to use the analysis of the running records to teach the next strategy or skill needed by a student
• How to take and score a running record	• How to challenge and teach those first graders who are scoring 100% on 2nd/3rd grade IRIs (Do we have materials to use with these students?)
• How to structure a Writer's Workshop (would like to improve peer conferencing instruction)	• More about teaching/questioning students during the interactive writing process
• Managing a center-run classroom	• Successfully running a full Writers Workshop (ideas, writing, editing, and publishing)
• Spelling	• How to develop/select appropriate mini-lessons in writing instruction
• To have high expectations for students	• How to develop students' questioning abilities during sharing and peer conferencing

and at-risk readers; phoneme awareness; explicit, systematic phonics instruction; and other areas. The district encouraged monthly professional reading and discussion groups, and organized its 1997 summer institute as a continuation of the literacy project.

The professional development produced such positive results, according to Tamo, that "teachers in grades four and five now want the same thing." They got a taste of the special focus on literacy in stage four of the district's pro-

fessional development. This established demonstration/observation classrooms at each grade level, K-5, providing the opportunity for both new and experienced teachers to see how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. Teams of teachers observed in the classrooms with their coaches, and then discussed the experience together. Arrangements were made for teachers who wanted additional time in the demonstration classrooms.

Evaluating What Was Happening

The district's sophisticated assessment system was strongly related to its professional development goals. Teachers needed to know a lot about running records and other forms of assessment to carry out the literacy initiatives.

When the district made significant changes in its language arts program 10 years ago, explains Gonia, it decided to move away from traditional testing to more holistic assessments. "We developed our own performance assessments, determining what we wanted students to show us in language arts and in math," she says. "Teachers use the same prompts and rubrics in the fall and in the spring with different domains of writing at each grade level."

Seven years ago the district began to use portfolios, designing a scale of 1-6 with 3 being the minimum score considered acceptable. The accumulated data from these assessments gave the district a base for its discussions about how to evaluate the class size reduction program.

Still, says Gonia, "we had to move to smaller classes so fast that we needed to react and then go back and see what we had done." The assessment plan puts academic achievement of students in grades K-3 at the top of the list of indicators for the district. Information from an Informal Reading Inventory and Running Record data, writing and math portfolios, and standardized tests (to begin in the 1997-98 school year) will together form the basis for the assessment.

The class size reduction program spurred the district to use the data it has more creatively. For example, according to Liz Bardar, Learning Specialist and Reading Recovery teacher at Hopkinson Elementary School and chair of the assessment committee, Reading Recovery data can reveal more than progress made by students having problems learning to read. The district could ask: Do fewer children need to be referred to the Reading Recovery pro-

Teacher-Designed Assessment of Smaller Class Sizes

A core of teachers at Hopkinson Elementary School, led by Liz Bardar, tackled the issue of evaluation of the smaller class sizes. When presented with the plan, the school staff "believed it was helpful and concrete," she says. As the assessment committee made plans, the Hopkinson design became the model for the district. The model was generalizable because each school has at least two teachers trained in Reading Recovery.

The academic achievement components of the plan include:

- *Grade-level performance, year-to-year.* The performance of students at each grade level (K-5) will be examined each year in reading, writing, and math. Data from the year prior to class size reduction will be included, and new testing data will be added in subsequent years as it becomes available. Performance of students will be examined to determine initial, cumulative, and sustained effects of class size reduction for each grade level. The data to be used for this analysis will come from IRI/ Running Record Scores, math and writing portfolio scores, Reading Recovery, standardized tests, and IASA information.
- *Longitudinal performance, grade-to-grade.* Using the same data as above, performance of students will be examined as they progress from year to year. This will help determine the initial, cumulative, and sustained effects of class size reduction for each group of students as it progresses through the grades.
- *Equity of performance.* Although the district does not currently have the technology readily available to disaggregate data, it realizes the importance of the ability to do this. The district is examining ways to facilitate the disaggregation of data so that the performance of strategic subgroups (such as gender, ethnicity, language fluency, stability) can be analyzed in the future.

For other outcome indicators, the plan includes:

- *Students.* A student survey will be conducted to measure student attitudes about their own achievement, success, and satisfaction. Results will be analyzed to help identify changes, strengths, and areas in need of improvement. In addition to this survey, the following data will be analyzed to help deter-

mine other effects of class size reduction: attendance records, retention rates, re-designation of LEP students, discipline records, and special education referrals.

- *Teachers.* Realizing that classroom teachers are at the heart of any instructional program, attention needs to be given to their strengths, needs, and attitudes. A teacher survey will be conducted to measure teacher morale, attitudes about the achievement and success of their students, and assessment of their own skills. Results will be analyzed to help identify changes, strengths, and areas in need of improvement. (The assessment committee added items about professional development.)
- *Parents.* The impact that parents will play in the implementation of class size reduction is well recognized. A parent survey will be conducted each year to measure parent involvement and attitudes about the achievement and success of their children as related to the class size reduction. Results will be analyzed to help identify changes, strengths, and areas in need of improvement.

gram? Are those assigned to it at a higher level of reading than in the past? Are they more successful in later grades because of being in smaller classes?

Because of extensive data collection for the Reading Recovery program since it began, the district will be able to demonstrate the effect of the smaller class sizes on students in the program.

Through surveys, the district also will gather data about student attitudes and behaviors, teacher attitudes, and parent involvement, as shown in the box above.

As the assessment committee discussed its plan, it began to consider whether the data might demonstrate that the district's bar needs to be raised. With only 4 percent of the students below grade level in reading at the end of the third grade, demonstrating the advantages of smaller class sizes might require higher standards. "We're not just addressing what is 'good enough,'" Laurel Telfer, Principal of Rossmoor Elementary School, said as she reviewed the data and the assessment plan. "If we analyze where our kids are, then teachers can take the data and determine where we want to be."

While the assessment plan was created specifically to respond to state requests for evaluation data, the assessment committee became more concerned about what it would tell parents and the community. "We don't know what the state wants," Gonia noted during one of the discussions. "What we need to work on is what we want to tell our public, and that goes back to the essential question: What will be different for students because of 20-1 classes?"

This led the committee to a decision to pull together all the data now available and prepare a report for parents in the fall. "People really care about this issue," pointed out Elaine Hamada, Coordinator of Instructional Materials, Media, and Special Programs. "We need a visual way to explain it to them." Possibilities of what will be shared with the public include samples of student writing as well as statistical profiles of student achievement. In addition, the committee decided that groups of mentor teachers would also work with the data over the summer and start establishing higher standards for students.

Postscript

It would have been better to have the baseline data first and then plan the initiative, Gonia says in hindsight. Still, the anecdotal evidence at the end of the first year of smaller classes is enough to satisfy the district that the benefits from smaller classes have been significant. "Almost to a teacher they've told me they are a much more connected group," she says. Learning Specialist Bea Tamo only has to walk through the classrooms to be convinced. She finds more individual help, calmer classrooms, happier teachers, and more parent contacts.

The initiative, however, may be costly to the Los Alamitos district. Eight years ago the district began to accept interdistrict transfers because it had space for additional students. People who worked in the district could enroll their children in its schools. Under the district's master plan, "the only way we could get additional dollars was to be a growing district," says Gonia. "Now, we are maxed out; we have no more space." The district is banking on a continued strong economy for the state in order to get more state funding.

The dollars received from the state during the first year of CSR did not cover Los Alamitos' operational costs. Gonia stresses the importance of expanded state funding and state assistance with facilities for overflowing dis-

tricts. The district has no more room to expand; using additional playground space for portables is not considered a good option.

Even though the Los Alamitos professional development created a quality environment for new teachers, Gonia worries about teacher quality in the primary grades across the state. "Teaching reading is very complex," she points out. "We need lots of money for professional development" to get the maximum benefits of class size reduction for students.

Los Alamitos 1997-98 Update

Los Alamitos has expanded its CSR program, which had already been implemented in grades one through three, to include kindergarten as well. Through use of existing classroom space, the district managed this expansion without adding more portables or reducing any classroom to less than 900 square feet.

Efforts to improve instruction through a strong and varied staff development program continue. The central theme of balanced literacy is addressed through seminars followed by classroom demonstrations, peer coaching with observations, and additional peer coaching following the observations. Student achievement results from the first year have been positive.

Since a large percentage of the district's students were already reading at or above grade level, the district did not anticipate "great leaps in improvement." However, results from the 1996-97 Informal Reading Inventory showed some progress for first-grade students and "clearly higher scores" for second and third grades. Another positive note: in this second year of CSR, teachers still report that they are better able to get to know their students, assessing and meeting their needs on a more personal and individualized basis than was possible in their pre-CSR classrooms.

RIVERSIDE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Over One Hurdle, Worried About the Next One

Enrollment 35,000 and climbing.

Increasing diversity and poverty level.

Early planning put teachers and portables in place.

Smaller class sizes for young children was an idea whose time had come, reasoned Riverside Unified School District Superintendent Anthony Lardieri. Therefore, he and his cabinet started planning early before the CSR program and money were approved, knowing they would have to move fast to obtain teachers and classroom space.

The school system was able to shift all first-grade students into smaller classes, then realized that it had a large enough teacher pool to move the plan into second grade at some schools. That's the gist of what happened in the fall of 1996, but "it wasn't nearly as simple as it seems," says Lardieri. "This wasn't a case of dividing students into groups of 20, and then it's done."

Careful Planning Aids the Process

In the hills east of Los Angeles, Riverside is the 13th largest district in the state—and growing at the rate of more than 1 percent a year. The minority student enrollment has climbed above 50 percent; the number of children at the poverty level is just under 50 percent. The area in general is growing, according to school officials, because the salary levels of jobs are good, and "people just want to get off the freeways."

This factor was an advantage as the district sought to hire more than 70 teachers within a few weeks in order to reduce first-grade class sizes. The plan called for year-round schools to go to smaller classes in October, and for traditional schools to move into smaller classes in February.

Some key features of the Riverside planning:

- All stakeholders were involved in the planning. Lardieri feels that this contributed to a transition that was "incredibly smooth."

- Although the school district recruited elsewhere, including out of state, most of the new teachers were from the area. There are five higher education institutions in the area—three public, two private—so the district has a good pool of beginning teacher candidates.

- Principals made decisions about where to place new teachers, and not all of them went into classes that were reduced in size.

- Materials were ordered early, ensuring that new classrooms would have the supplies they needed when the move to smaller classes was made.

- Teachers were hired a month before they began teaching. Two weeks were taken up with intensive staff development and district orientation. During the remaining two weeks, the new teachers worked and observed in the yet-to-be-divided classes with the students they would soon be teaching. This gave them a chance to see an experienced teacher with these students and to discuss individual students as well as observe classroom management strategies. By the time classes were split, students who were being reassigned were familiar with their new teachers, and there was very little parent resistance.

Fifty percent of the new hires had emergency credentials, many because they were in their internship year at their campus. Despite this high number of inexperienced teachers, only seven were not rehired for the next year. In the words of Georgia Hill, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, "we got some outstanding teachers."

The district added to the professional development required by the state—such as learning how to diagnose learning needs of individual students—with topics such as basic instructional skills. Its ongoing professional development, "often on a daily basis," according to Hill, covered areas such as classroom management skills.

Finding space for the teachers and classrooms was another matter. The district conducted a "crash project" to find enough portable classrooms, says Assistant Superintendent for Operations Kirk Lewis. Time was not as big an issue as other problems; Lewis' staff had contacted portable manufacturers early. With architectural plans in hand, the district could erect a portable classroom in one week. However, the 70 portables the district put in place strained both its budget and the space at school sites.

Each portable cost $50,000 to purchase and set up; reimbursement from the state was only $25,000 each. Furthermore, the district is running out of playground space at some schools, with no additional land available to purchase at these sites.

"Even the mice are feeling crowded," Superintendent Lardieri says, trying to be light-hearted about a serious problem.

Still, the superintendent and his top staff maintain that the move to smaller classes was the right thing to do. The district involved parents and the community in its planning and, through surveys conducted during the year, has found that the move is still supported.

There is no going back to larger classes as far as parents are concerned, says Lardieri. And even the most thick-skinned policy maker would find it hard to turn back the times for primary-grade teachers "who are walking a foot taller than a year ago."

The Jefferson Elementary Experience: Confusion and Overload, but the Results Are "Worth It"

Jefferson Elementary School Principal Shanda Morgan was an assistant principal when she got the word that CSR legislation was a reality. When she was appointed principal of Jefferson School, a year-round school, she immediately began working on putting the details into place that would accommodate the additional CSR requirements and make the most of the smaller classes.

If Morgan had taken the time to make a "to-do" list late in the summer of 1996, it might have included:

- Calculate the date in October when it was most likely that her 1,000 K-6-grade students would have all had the same amount of time in school for the year and schedule the switch for smaller class sizes for that date. (The year-round school has four tracks, each on a different schedule.)
- Divvy up students into the smaller classes keeping in mind gender, ethnicity, sibling matches, and heterogeneous reading levels; all first grades and some second grades implemented CSR.
- Arrange for each of the four year-round tracks to have one first- and second-grade combination class in order to have "wiggle room" when new children enroll.
- Shift some teachers out of the reading labs into regular classes, consider requests from intermediate teachers who wanted to move to smaller classes in primary grades, and hire four new teachers.
- Supervise professional development for new and transferred teachers, including training on the Success for All model.
- Order materials and equipment for new classrooms, and schedule maintenance for additional rooms.
- Hold extra meetings with parents and send out more newsletters than usual to assure them that the transition was going smoothly.
- Make sure that four portable classrooms were installed just before October 28, the day set for the shift to smaller classes.

Somewhere in all of this confusion and overload, Morgan forgot that she was a brand new principal who, under ordinary circumstances, would have

New Teachers Learn to Be Old Hands in a Hurry

Working with a combined first- and second-grade class would be daunting for most experienced teachers, and Michelle Berns and Kathy Jacobs were brand new teachers when they took on this assignment at Jefferson Elementary School. However, their self-assurance was high because of the preparation the district had given them. "I had tons of inservice training," says Jacobs, describing two months of preparation, much of it spent with the teacher who was in charge of the students Jacobs soon would have. Berns was particularly helped by both the school mentor and the district mentor available to her.

Both new teachers were grateful for the chance to be part of a classroom before they took over their own. They sat in on parent conferences, easing parents' concerns about the switch to different teachers. Jacobs points to these parent-teacher conferences she observed as providing her with insight about the process.

When the transfer was made, the new teachers began with materials shared by the teachers to whom they had been assigned, as well as all of the student records and work compiled for them by these teachers. Jacobs praised all the experienced school staff for being "so supportive." Berns found it especially helpful to start teaching in a school with a strong Success for All program. A national program for the early grades that stresses the need for early competence in reading, it provided her with extra inservice training, a full range of materials, and other resources on site, including a mentor in Carol Stotler, the Success for All facilitator.

This was "an exciting time to come into education," Berns believes. And Jacobs would recommend coming into it as the two of them did—"with the kind of support this district gave."

been expected to take things slowly at first and enjoy something of a honeymoon in her new job. But there was no time for that.

Besides, Morgan was making something happen for children that she had always wished were possible. An experienced teacher in San Gabriel County before coming to the Riverside Unified School District as an assistant principal three years ago, Morgan believes that the initiative to reduce class sizes for young children "is far more important and helpful than all those reform edicts from the sky."

Although the starting date for Jefferson Elementary was in October, newly hired teachers started at the beginning of September. In addition to

Success for All training, they had time and opportunity to observe the students who would be assigned to them, to watch experienced teachers in the classroom, and to sit in on parent conferences.

Morgan made sure that a mix of novice and experienced teachers was assigned to each year-round track, to allow for continuing informal mentoring. Finally, the Success for All facilitator was available on a continuing basis to coach and provide information on best practices in such areas as writing, phonemic awareness, and cooperative learning.

A walk around her bilingual/bi-literate campus shows clearly why smaller classes are so critical. In a 32-student kindergarten class, children are bounding everywhere, asking anyone who comes in for attention; it's almost impossible for the teacher to provide time to individual students. In a nearby first grade, the class is calm and orderly, working in groups while the teacher attends to a single student. Primary students are grouped for reading by levels of ability, not grade, and with the addition of more teachers it is possible for the 90 minutes of reading time every morning to be organized in groups of about 10 children to a teacher—as compared to 15 students before the CSR program.

"I know that this meets the needs of Title I children," says Morgan. "Teachers get to know each child's progress better, can take more anecdotal notes, and prevent problems sooner." Little things that are big for children become possible, such as a teacher being able to change her reward system from stickers to ice cream.

Morgan wants smaller class sizes for young children to be the norm. She describes the typical experience of children—one-on-one attention in a family, then to a play group, on to a Head Start classroom of 20 children, then dumped into a kindergarten class with 30 or more peers, then into smaller classes for a couple of years, then big ones again. "And we wonder why Johnny can't read," she says.

Although her staff supports the changes, there is recognition that they introduce some unfairness within a school. Teachers in the smaller classes have fewer parent conferences, fewer grades to record, and even need to spend less time at the copy machine. Still, when they talk about the effect of the smaller

classes on children, the negatives do not seem important. Consider these comments from some of Morgan's first-grade and second-grade teachers:

- "There is less stress level on the kids. They feel they are more in touch with you, that they have more space and less noise to distract them."
- "There are not fewer behavioral problems, because naughty kids are still naughty, but the problems are easier to handle, and the quieter kids are coming out of their shells. I can give them attention. We get more done and can attempt more interesting things, such as science experiments and cooking."
- "I can put up everyone's writing work on the bulletin board instead of just a few."

The strong Success for All program at Jefferson Elementary already had a telling effect on reading achievement. Despite being the largest elementary school in the district and one in which more than two-thirds of the students are from low-income families and 20 percent are LEP students, Jefferson exceeds the district average in reading, writing, and math on standardized test scores. Morgan expects the smaller classes to complement other efforts that produced the hard-earned gains in reading.

All of her challenges in her first year as a principal at Jefferson diverted Morgan from her real passion—being an instructional leader. She is the kind of principal who wants to be in every classroom every day, which would be quite a feat in a school with 40 teachers. She wants to know every child by name. Her management duties made these goals difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. And if the initiative expands to other grades, she will be managing a crisis again. Still, she says, "When I walk into those rooms, I know it was worth it."

Where to Go from Here

Having weathered what seemed like an impossible task at first, officials of the Riverside district believe they have reached the end of their tether in terms of fiscal and human capital. To finish reducing class sizes in the second grade district-wide, the district will need 15 additional portables, and 42 more portables if it extends the smaller class sizes to split-day kindergartens.

Even though the district is "growing its own" bilingual teachers through collaboration with local campuses, it has a serious shortage of such teachers. The pool of readily available teachers for regular classrooms is used up.

Lardieri and his management staff take an even longer view, however, and see several things that need to be in place:

- Permanent funding for the program from the state that is based on a per pupil index because of anticipated increases in the per pupil cost. The $800 per pupil that the district spent in the first year will climb to $1,000 in a few years as new teachers move up the salary schedule.
- Some flexibility in staffing, such as an average target rather than a classroom maximum. The district currently maintains class sizes that are two or more pupils less than the initiative calls, with an average of 18.5 students, in order to stay under state mandates in case new pupils enroll.
- Greater state investment in facilities. Not only is the district running out of room to put portables, but the price of portables has shown a steady increase in one year. The superintendent is concerned over the increasing cost of portable classrooms.
- Some flexibility in hiring teachers from out of state and in giving them more time to obtain credentials. Higher education institutions cannot handle the demand for teachers, says Glenn King, Riverside's Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Affirmative Action, and Riverside has had to attend recruitment fairs as far away as the Midwest.
- Understanding by all parties that the effects of CSR cannot be evaluated accurately if the focus is too narrow or if it is done too quickly. Phillip Perez, Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Services, points to Riverside's efforts to collect baseline data and to collect running record information as a critical first step. There is also agreement among the staff that benefits of CSR are broader than would be measured by standardized tests. Perez describes the district's evaluation plan as "multi-indicator."

The CSR program has encouraged the Riverside district to be more innovative. The district has put together a unique staff development plan, is exploring multiple ways of assessing young children, and is even thinking of creating K-3 and 4-6 schools to help with the space problem. Despite the problems, says the superintendent, "this program is too popular to lose."

Riverside Unified 1997-98 Update

During the first year of CSR, Riverside Unified moved all of its first grades and some of its second grades to 20-to-1. This year all second grades are part of the program; smaller classes were introduced in July for year-round programs and in September for traditional schedules. CSR is now being phased in for kindergarten classes as the necessary portables are delivered. Even though not all classrooms were ready, all the kindergarten teachers newly hired for CSR began working at the beginning of the school year. This gave them time to get to know the children, parents, other teachers, and the program before students were reassigned. Phillip Perez, Deputy Superintendent, describes this period as providing time for bonding between new teachers and students as well as on-the-job training; the result was a higher comfort level for all parties when the children moved to new classrooms.

Perez anticipates that all the portables needed for full CSR implementation in kindergarten will be delivered and available by the end of January. The district is already planning for 1998-99. It is likely, although not certain, that CSR will be implemented for third grade, with more portables needed.

When asked about the district's continuing experience with CSR, Perez identifies the increased attention and more focused instruction available to individual students as a strong plus. However, since many of the teachers hired for the program are less experienced than the typical Riverside Unified teacher, he sees the need to concentrate efforts on maintaining high-quality instruction through staff development and support for the new teachers. Reconfiguring kindergarten classes during the school year posed another challenge. Many children had to shift classes, with some even moving between the morning and afternoon sessions. Parents were concerned about the lack of stability for these youngest students, and they needed explanations and reassurance. In Perez's words, the principals did a "phenomenal job of communicating to parents."

Perez echoes the concern of other California school administrators about the 20-to-1 cap. He wants every child and parent to feel as though there is "a place for him, but children don't come in packages of 20," and he worries what might have to be done with the 21st child who needs a place.

CONCLUSION

Lessons from the First Year of Class Size Reduction

The first year of the Class Size Reduction program was difficult and hectic for administrators and teachers across the state. In all six of the districts visited for this report, action had to be taken quickly—teachers hired, staff training developed and provided, classrooms reorganized or built—so that the schools were ready to make the move to a class size of 20-to-1.

But what comes through clearly is the sense that decisions were not made haphazardly. Thoughtful planning was involved, and the administrators and teachers interviewed express satisfaction with the decisions made despite the short time available.

In reflecting on the first year, the staff in the six districts repeatedly mentioned a number of challenges (some anticipated and some not), as well as successes. These educators also look to the future—and they have both concerns and recommendations important to the long-term success of the CSR program.

The Challenges

Some of the most vexing and immediate problems facing school districts were one-time occurrences. For example, schools on year-round schedules had

to pick a day in the fall to make the change to smaller classes when students in their various tracks had attended school for approximately the same amount of time. Also, the quick scramble for portable classrooms put districts in competition with each other and led to later "gouging" experienced by some districts as they bid for scarce portable facilities.

As surveys and newspaper headlines confirm, finding qualified teachers on short notice presented the most formidable challenge. The districts in these stories filled the positions (with the usual frustrations over a shortage of bilingual teachers) more easily than very large districts. In their own estimation, most offer very competitive salaries and have a reputation for professional support. Some have developed close working relationships with local teacher preparation campuses, allowing them to "grow their own" beginning teachers. Most of their teachers without certification were interns. At the end of the year, few of those hired so hastily were dismissed. The largest percentage of no-returns reported by a district was about 10 percent.

More specifically and more long-term, the districts shared some common problems:

- **An exhausted teacher pool.** Districts raided their own programs to find teachers, using up substitute teachers and thus limiting flexibility for all teachers. They deployed school-level specialists to help out on professional development; as a result, the specialists' roles were sometimes only partially covered. They hired some teachers who did not meet their usual standards and needed to make extra investments in preparing and supporting them.

  The districts are now up against the wall, however. The inadequate supply of teachers from teacher preparation programs cannot immediately allow for expansion of the program without severely compromising these districts' desire for teacher quality. What was primarily an urban problem in the first year of the effort is definitely now a statewide problem.

  The districts worry not only that teacher preparation programs cannot cope with the supply issue, but also that some offer outdated programs that do not properly prepare teachers for the complex, research-based early literacy programs that districts want.

- **No more space.** Some districts found alternative space without taking away common areas such as libraries and computer labs, but others used

these spaces in order to make the change possible. Most of these districts had to depend on further use of portable classrooms. (The Office of the Legislative Analyst reports that more than half of the smaller classes were housed in portables.) Long-range plans to eventually eliminate portables from children's educational experiences were shelved; the major problem became one of finding where to put the portables themselves. They are encroaching on playground space for all children.

Portables also are becoming more expensive because of the supply-and-demand reaction of the market. Expansion of the CSR program will seriously impact whole schools and even district configurations as grade levels are moved around or as shared space, such as with after-school services, needs to be taken back.

- **Burden on administrators.** The euphoria over working hard on an emergency basis for something that was extraordinarily beneficial kept many administrators going. Eventually, however, the toll has to be addressed. Principals have more teachers to evaluate, more personnel to supervise, and different responsibilities. As districts seek to ensure that smaller classes result in instructional changes, principals need instructional leadership skills while, at the same time, they are taking on more management responsibilities.

- **Confusion over assessments.** Without baseline data from the beginning of the initiative, districts fear they will be unable to demonstrate the effects of the large investment in smaller class sizes. Only those districts with a data-gathering system in place for the early grades before the 1996-97 school year will be in a position to fully evaluate the impact of smaller class sizes.

  The districts felt hostage to state policy making on this issue because of the delay in state guidelines for collection of data. They could only "guess," as one district official noted, and hope their preliminary plans would fit with the state's eventual requirements.

  Changes in reading programs that took place at the same time, along with the staff development required to prepare teachers for the reading initiative, will make it very difficult to draw causal inferences about the effect of smaller classes on student achievement.

Two factors further muddy the assessment picture. One is the continuing debate over results of the effects of smaller class sizes, with researchers disputing each other's conclusions. The other factor is the nature of assessment of young children itself. There is little research on the validity of the preference of many teachers for informal assessment measures, nor is there much of a research base on testing before grade three.

- **Inequities created by the program.** Most of the attention to possible inequities resulting from the CSR program concern the greater percentage of less-qualified teachers hired to teach in inner-city schools, where expert instruction is needed the most. However, districts experienced internal inequities, as well. Teachers of intermediate grade levels or lower grades not included in the initiative could see the difference almost too vividly. They had more grades to prepare, more parent conferences, longer times at the copy machine, and the usual problems of larger classes.

  When resources permitted, principals tried to create more balance by providing help from aides or additional prep time. Where there was good collaboration among staff, teachers not included in the initiative accepted the differences because they anticipated better-prepared students for their classrooms. Some districts made sure that this problem was addressed in professional development for new teachers so they would be aware of potential resentments.

  A few principals observed that the choices districts had to make created fragmented experiences for young children, who might move from small classes in Head Start, to large kindergartens, then back to smaller classes for one or two years, then into larger ones. Their path may be even more erratic if they transferred from one school to another in a district where implementation of smaller class sizes must be selective because of staffing, space, and fiscal problems.

  Where the selection focuses on those schools enrolling larger numbers of low-income children, the district may face a community relations problem. The popularity of smaller classes among parents in general may make choices tough for school officials.

Stories of Success

School administrators, teachers, and parents were determined to make class size reduction work for children. Despite initial tasks that were seemingly overwhelming, all of the districts in these profiles decided immediately that they would participate and do whatever was necessary. The prospect of gaining money was not a deciding factor; all but one of the districts profiled actually needed to spend more dollars than they received from the state. The deciding factor was the benefit for their young children. From all indications, they were right.

- **Learning environments changed dramatically for the better.** It is clearly too soon to determine whether class size reduction will directly result in increased long-term student achievement. But even without quantitative data other than informal assessments by teachers, the school districts unanimously reported that the teaching and learning process was enhanced by smaller class sizes. Professional development focused on changing instructional practice to take advantage of smaller classes. With fewer students, teachers were able to do more. Observational data found:

  - more individual attention to children that drew upon professional knowledge, such as diagnosis of children's needs and progress, more frequent assessments, and tailored programs that sometimes prevented special education or behavioral referrals;

  - more opportunities for young children to be on task in learning to read, write, and compute through smaller reading groups, greater use of hands-on learning experiences, more individual attention from teachers, and increased access to learning resources such as computers, in-class libraries, and centers;

  - manageable classrooms that are pleasant for children and teachers, meaning less noise, more orderly transition from one activity to another, quicker attention to behavior problems, and greater cooperation among students rather than the previous competition for attention from the teacher.

- **Working conditions for teachers improved remarkably.** The high teacher morale of those in the smaller classes came from satisfaction in successes with children and in getting more done than ever before. Fewer

students meant that teachers spent less of their time running off copies, grading papers, conferencing, and dealing with discipline problems–and more time teaching children.

- **Greater professional support for teachers.** The combination of professional development for the reduced class sizes and development opportunities for all elementary-grade teachers through the state's reading initiative created more intensive and focused development for teachers than in previous years. Districts also improved their mentoring programs and tried new approaches to professional development designed to result in better programs in the future. The experiences helped schools begin to create greater professional communities as staff worked together to make the transition possible and as they shared development experiences.

- **Greater sense of community for schools.** In addition to bringing the professional staff together, teachers in the smaller classes could make more contacts with parents. Schools reached out to parents to help them through the transition and also to inform parents whose children were in grades not affected by the change in order to emphasize the benefits for the school as a whole. Surveys of parents allowed them to articulate the effect of the change on their children.

  Each district also carried out the changes through special committees and task forces that most often included parents and community members. The wider school community took the effort on as a shared responsibility.

- **Opportunity for creativity.** Schools and school districts, out of necessity, often "broke out of the box" in their thinking and organization. For example, a decision to organize 32-to-2 classes in one district for space reasons led it to select and prepare teachers especially for partnership teaching, an idea it wants to spread to other classrooms because of the benefits. Schools adopted or improved pairing new and experienced teachers over a long period of time.

  The need to develop long-range assessments of reduced class sizes sparked conversations about the indicators teachers and administrators consider important beyond test scores, as well as greater structure for the assessment of young children. Districts reviewed their long-range facilities plans, making adjustments that led to better use of portables (because they are going to be around longer than anticipated) or, in one district, to the design of portables that are easier to maintain and built to district specifications.

Ongoing Needs

Interviewed after the first full year of implementation of CSR, the administrators and teachers listed concerns that primarily were the problems of start-up efforts and difficulties caused by such rapid implementation. Some of their other, more long-range concerns were only partially addressed in state legislation passed this summer:

- Funding was increased to a per-pupil amount of $800 as compared to $650 for 1996-97.
- A higher facilities subsidy for new CSR classrooms was authorized for 1997-98 ($40,000 per teaching station, compared with $25,000 in 1996-97).

In addition, to help districts meet their need for teachers, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing amended its previous policy to now allow a waiver for a teacher who holds credentials from another state, another country, or who has completed a teacher preparation program in California, but who is unable to attain the credential because of a failure to meet all credential requirements.

It is clear from comments made in several of the districts that legislative action has not yet adequately addressed concerns over future costs. As new teachers move up the salary scale, the per-pupil cost of the smaller class sizes will rise $200 or more among the districts within the next four years. New classrooms and the space in which to put them have also been both more expensive and harder to come by in the 1997-98 school year.

Similarly, legislative action has not adequately addressed the serious facilities shortages already created by California's rapid enrollment growth and now compounded by CSR. Even without the CSR initiative, funds needed for school construction to keep up with enrollment have been estimated at $40 billion during the next 10 years. Added on to this, the real funding need for CSR classrooms has been estimated at $1 billion. If this challenge is not met, districts face continuing financial and space problems that will, ultimately, negatively affect the education of California's children.

The districts in this study also believe a greater investment in professional development is key to making smaller class sizes live up to their potential. The state's investment in the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program still reaches only a handful of districts. One of the profiled district's highly successful experience with this program (Glendale) is an argument for extending the program statewide.

Teacher preparation appears to be a problem almost equal to teacher supply. Districts want teachers better prepared for balanced literacy programs in the early grades and with more experience with actual classroom practice. They were able to create their own versions of preparation by assigning newly hired teachers to classrooms a few weeks or even a month ahead of time to work alongside experienced teachers and with the students they would teach. Still, many districts are having a problem hiring any new teachers, period. Some administrators want greater flexibility in hiring teachers from out of state.

The districts also need in-school flexibility in maintaining the 20-1 student-teacher ratio, such as the current proposal for an average of 20 students and an absolute cap of 22. Without that flexibility, most of the districts maintained classes at 18-to-1 or 19-to-1 to make sure new enrollees did not tip the class beyond the state maximum. This was expensive and always "iffy," especially in districts where student turnover is a problem.

In addition, the absolute cap creates situations where districts are forced to make decisions based on numbers, rather than the best educational interests of individual children. For example, a new first-grade child coming into a school with three first-grade classrooms, two of which are already at the 20-child maximum, must be placed in the under-capacity classroom even if that class is not the most appropriate placement for him or her. Administrators expressed concern and frustration with the situation, but they felt that the need to be fiscally responsible—especially when many districts cannot fully pay for CSR even with the $800 per-pupil state aid—potentially forced them to make hard and unwelcome choices.

These are difficult short-range and long-range problems that will take a combination of state-level and district-level policy making to solve. However, if there is one message from the schools and districts in these profiles, it is they are willing to work out solutions, no matter what it takes.

The reason why: politically and educationally, these educators believe there is no going back. Smaller class sizes are here to stay. The challenges for school leaders are to make sure that smaller class sizes translate into increased learning for children, and to collect objective, quantitative evidence that will clearly show the results of this reform.

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Appendix A: California Class Size Reduction in Brief

Legislation passed by California in July 1996 targeted incentive funding for schools to implement class size reduction in the early grades. Participation in the Class Size Reduction (CSR) program was voluntary. In schools that chose to participate, the program was required to first be implemented in first grade, then second grade, and finally, in either third grade or kindergarten. For every classroom with 20 or fewer students, the district received $650 per student for operational costs. There was also an option to decrease class sizes for half the school day, with instruction in reading and math to be the focus for this time; under this option, $325 per student was funded by the state.

In order to receive funding, districts were required to apply by November 1, 1996, and to have the program operational by February 16, 1997. An additional $200 million in state funding was authorized, targeted toward providing the classrooms needed for the initiative. Districts choosing to participate in CSR were required to provide staff development targeted at providing teachers with the techniques and skills needed to take advantage of the smaller classes.

A report issued in February 1997 by the California Legislative Analyst's Office summarized what had happened with CSR during the first year of implementation. Across the state, 92 percent of first-grade students and 74 percent of second-grade students were taught in a CSR classroom. Application of the initiative to kindergarten and third grades was described as "significantly less common." With 853 of 895 districts in the state participating, the entire $200 million allocated for facilities, plus $630 out of the $771 million allocated for operational costs, were expected to be claimed.

CSR classrooms contained an average of 19 children, as districts tried to ensure that children moving into a school would not push a classroom above the 20-to-1 cap and so disqualify it for state funding. Over 18,000 teachers were hired specifically for CSR. On average, they had less teaching experience and fewer qualifications than teachers hired pre-CSR; 21 percent were hired on emergency certificates. Most districts also reported using non-CSR money to make up the difference between state-provided operational and facilities funding and what the initiative actually cost.

Legislation passed in the summer of 1997 expanded the program. Districts could now choose to include both kindergarten and third grades, and per pupil funding was raised to $800. Although the amount authorized by the state was raised to $1.5 billion (from $1 billion in 1996-97), concern has been expressed that the cost of each new classroom needed this year will be significantly higher than last year, since districts have already used any low-cost available space. To fully implement CSR from kindergarten though third grade, it is estimated that an additional 16,500 teachers will be needed.

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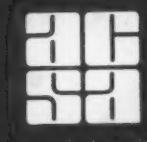

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